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ILLYA KURYAKIN

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THE SYNTHETIC STORM AFFAIR

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1967

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THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E. MAGAZINE

NAPOLEON SOLO · ILLYA KURYAKIN

May, 1967 VOL. 3, NO. 4

NEW FULL LENGTH U.N.C.L.E. NOVEL

THE SYNTHETIC STORM AFFAIR

by ROBERT HART DAVIS

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Deadly beyond belief was the secret THRUSH *had learned—how to goad Nature herself into a frenzy that could ravage the world as Illya and Solo sought the perverted madman who could summon the very hurricane of hell to do his bidding.*

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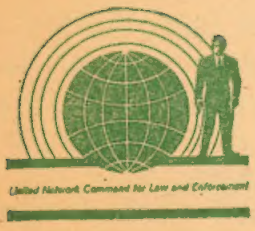

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THE SYNTHETIC STORM AFFAIR

The Atoll of a Thousand Deaths, *men called it. From it maddened Nature would unleash a storm which would engulf all mankind, unless Solo and Illya could get there before it was too late—and still stay alive!*

THE NEW COMPLETE "U.N.C.L.E." NOVEL

by ROBERT HART DAVIS

ACT I—A STORMY FUTURE

IT HAD BEEN a most trying business, that *Stolen Steamer Affair,* and Napoleon Solo, felt that he had earned a good rest. And what better way to spend a vacation in Rio than in the company of an extremely beautiful woman?

Solo surveyed himself in the full length mirror in his suite in Rio de Janeiro. Slender, medium height, with dark hair and a cleft chin, he admitted that he wasn't exactly a Dracula in appearance. But he also wondered what there was about him that beat the time of two Hollywood movie stars for the company of luscious Lula LaAmour.

Lula, along with the other Hollywood types, was in Rio to film an extravaganza called "Rompin' in Rio." Napoleon had only asked her for a date from force of habit he had when meeting any lovely unattached young woman.

It surprised him when she accepted instead of taking up invitations from the handsome actors. Movie stars aren't easy to date.

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FEATURING

NAPOLEON SOLO and ILLYA KURYAKIN

But although he thought her crazy, he was grateful for her idiocy. Lula was the new Marilyn Monroe. A latter-day version of Jean Harlow. The reincarnated spirit of original vampire, Theda Bara.

Napoleon Solo adjusted the carnation in his evening clothes lapel and thought with genuine pleasure of the envy his entrance with the film queen would elicit from his colleagues, Illya Kuryakin and Mark Slate. He even hoped that April Dancer, the Girl from U.N.C.L.E., would be a bit jealous.

Solo grinned at his image. "We know how Don Juan must have felt, eh, old chap?" he said.

He looked at his watch. It was almost time to pick up Lula. He started for the door and stopped when he remembered that he had not called Illya Kuryakin, to let the other U.N.C.L.E. agent know that he would not be available that evening for anything less than a four-alarm emergency.

But as he walked over to pick up the telephone, it rang. He picked it up.

"Harmon," he said, using the name he was registered under.

"Mr. Harmon?" Napoleon recognized the slightly Spanish accent of the hotel desk clerk. "I have a message for you from New York. The gentleman who called said it was most urgent."

The Man from U.N.C.L.E. sighed. He had an unhappy vision of the technicolored image of Lula LaAmour vanishing as a curtain marked "business" drew across the screen.

"Yes?" he said wearily. "What is the message?"

"The caller said to inform you that the closing market in New York is decidedly unsteady."

"Thank you," Napoleon said with ill grace.

He dropped the telephone into its cradle and considered the cryptic message. He understood it. U.N.C.L.E. headquarters wanted him to call it. Thoughtfully he took a silver fountain pen from his pocket and twisted the cap. A tiny antenna shot up six inches.

"Central Control," he said into the ultra-miniature transmitter built into the fake pen.

The electronic wizardry of the tiny communications set bridged the distance to U.N.C.L.E. headquarters in New York with face-to-face clarity.

"Mr. Solo?" a slightly English accented voice said from the set.

"Yes, sir, Mr. Waverly," Solo replied to his chief's brief question.

"What is her name, Mr. Solo?" the U.N.C.L.E. chief said.

"Whose name, sir?" Napoleon answered.

"The lady whose escort for the evening I am stealing."

"You won't believe me, but it is Lula LaAmour."

"The—er—buxom actress?"

"Buxom only in the right places, sir."

The complete novels depicting the amazing adventures of Napoleon Solo and Illya Kuryakin and the rest of the famous cast of characters making up the great organization known as United Network Command for Law and Enforcement—are especially written, entirely brand-new and inspired by the tremendously exciting MGM-ARENA popular television series—"The Man From U.N.C.L.E."

"Well, her type can always find a substitute escort, fortunately."

"But my type can't find a substitute for her type!"

"Fortunately, Mr. Solo," Alexander Waverly went on. "I never let my emotions interfere with business. Do you, Mr. Solo?"

Napoleon Solo sighed.

"No, sir, I do not," Solo said sadly, "but only because you will not let me."

"An excellent observation, Mr. Solo," Waverly said. "I need you on a matter of the gravest concern. I also need Mr. Kuryakin. I suppose he has one of these actresses dated for the evening?"

"No, sir," Solo said. "He is having dinner with April Dancer."

"Then I will have three of my operatives upset for the price of two."

"Yes, sir," Napoleon said.

"I assure you, Mr. Solo, that this is a matter of the utmost importance or I would not interrupt your well earned vacation. It is so urgent that every second counts. Every second! The lives of thousands now and millions later depend upon prompt and decisive action."

"Yes, sir," Solo replied crisply. "What is the problem?"

"There is registered at the Quitandinha Hotel a man named Senor Pablo de Santos-Lopez. This man is a world reknown meteorologist and has been working in South Argentina on a revolutionary method of breaking up storms. We have a tip that this man's life is in extreme danger. Protect him at all costs."

"Yes, sir," Solo said. "Is THRUSH involved?"

"Yes," Waverly replied. "We are not sure just how, but THRUSH agents are showing an extraordinary interest in Dr. Santos-Lopez. We believe they intend to kidnap him."

"I see, sir," Solo said. "If Santos-Lopez can really break up storms, it would be an important war weapon."

"This man has been very secretive about his experiments," Waverly said. "But it stands to reason that if a man can break a storm, he may be in a fair way to discover how to start one!"

"That would really be something," Napoleon said. His face grew grave at the implications. "I believe I've read that typhoons carry the destructive fury of a thousand atomic bombs."

"That is correct, Mr. Solo," Waverly said. "A weapon like that in the hands of THRUSH could be disastrous. I do not know that there is such a weapon, mind you,

but it is a chance we cannot afford to take. You see now how grave the situation is."

"Yes, sir," Napoleon Solo replied. "Illya and I will get on it at once. Is there any evidence of a direct contact between this meteorologist and THRUSH?"

"There was a conference between this man and a THRUSH agent in Buenos Aires three days ago," Waverly said. "Apparently it was not a satisfactory one. Santos-Lopez left the city under an assumed name and came to Rio. He is registered at the hotel as Senor Diego de Vega. He seems afraid, according to my information."

"We will contact him immediately," Solo said.

"Good!" Waverly said. "And Mr. Solo—"

"Yes, sir?"

"I know the producer of Miss Lula LaAmour's films. I will arrange with him to get you an autographed picture of the lady. A sort of consolation prize, shall we say!"

Solo broke off the connection ruefully. Although there was a certain amount of chagrin at losing his date with the lovely movie star, years of working with the great crime-fighting organization known as U.N.C.L.E., had made Napoleon something of a philosopher.

TWO

WITH WAVERLY the job came first, last and always. The dedicated man in the driver's seat in New York made that plain to all of them. They also knew that he demanded the same devotion to duty of himself that he asked of them.

Solo slipped into his coat and walked across the hall to Illya Kuryakin's room. He found his partner just putting on his coat. Illya was a slightly smaller man than Solo and his blond hair contrasted with Solo's dark head. The blond hair had a perpetual unruliness about it that somehow matched the look in Illya Kuryakin's eyes. His pale blue eyes stared out of his Slavic face with a hint of sadness when he caught the expression on Napoleon Solo's face.

"Don't tell me," he said plaintively. "Mr. Waverly called. Mr. Waverly said in effect that vacations are for bums. And he said—"

"A man's life is in extreme danger," Napoleon broke in. "Waverly said there wasn't a second to lose."

"Have you arranged for wheels or is it within walking distance?" Illya said crisply, his manner changing to grim efficiency.

"A cab will be in front of the hotel in three minutes."

"I can make it to the lobby in two minutes flat," Illya said. "That leaves me one minute to take care of an essential matter."

He picked up the room phone and dialed room service.

"I want a hot dog," he said. "That's right. Put one on a silver

platter. Deliver it to room three hundred four, occupied by a Miss April Dancer. Tell her that the 'dinner'—provided through the courtesy of Mr. Alexander Waverly—is a substitute for the pheasant under glass with caviar and champagne promised her by one Illya Kuryakin."

He grinned at Solo as he jammed down the phone. "Come on, Napoleon," he said. "Adventure calls again!"

"It's okay for you to take this lightly," Solo said with a grimace. "A date with a girl married to her job like April could not possibly be more than just a friendly evening. But Lula and I might have made some beautiful music together."

"Sure!" Illya retorted. "She would have sung you right into the movies yourself. You could dodge ersatz bullets instead of real ones."

"I don't know but what I wouldn't like that to this," Napoleon said gloomily. "There was a tone in Waverly's voice that indicated this was going to be one tough case."

"What is it?" Kuryakin asked as they hurried down the hall to the elevator.

"He hinted that THRUSH was on the track of a method to control storms. Can you imagine the havoc they could raise if they could hit us with a hurricane or typhoon at will?"

Illya Kuryakin whistled softly. His face grew more grave.

"A hurricane can do more damage to a town than a bombing," he said slowly.

"Mr. Waverly said the average typhoon packs the explosive force of a thousand atom bombs," Napoleon Solo said.

"And worse," Illya added, "the storm travels over a wide track. A directed hurricane could strike Miami in Florida and devastate the entire Atlantic coast all the way to Canada!"

"Not only the coast but inland for a hundred miles," Napoleon said hurriedly. "Imagine not one storm, but a series hitting the East Coast, the West Coast and the Gulf States simultaneously! Millions would die. The country would be paralyzed. The effect would be greater than any possible nuclear bombing by intercontinental ballistic missiles."

"If this thing is true—and Waverly should know—then THRUSH has come up with the most devastatingly terrible weapon the world has ever known."

"It looks like that is what we're faced with."

"What's our lead, if any?" Illya asked.

"A world famed meteorologist named Campos-Lopez seems to be the key to this thing. THRUSH is after him. He is staying here in Rio incognito. We are going to see him now."

AT THE meteorologist's hotel a frigidly polite desk clerk informed them that the hotel never gave any

information about its guests. Napoleon Solo flashed his U.N.C.L.E. identification card and the clerk's manner changed abruptly.

"I am sorry, sir," he said. "The gentleman you inquire about is registered here as Senor Diego de Vega of Argentina. He left early this morning and has not returned. I have no idea where he went."

"I see," Solo said. "It is very important that we contact him as soon as possible. If he—"

"But wait, sir! Yes, it is he! Senor de Vega is just getting out of the cab outside."

"Yes, I see him," Illya Kuryakin said. "The gray-haired man paying the cabbie."

"Come on," Napoleon said, striding rapidly across the lobby.

Illya Kuryakin frowned slightly as if hit by an uneasy hunch. His hand reached up and touched the small automatic in the shoulder holster under his coat. He missed the super U.N.C.L.E. gun, but it was much too large to carry under the coat.

Solo went out the revolving doors just ahead of his companion.

"Dr. Campos-Lopez?" he said, extending his hand to the stooped gray-haired man who was just turning away from the cab driver.

The meteorologist jumped back against the cab. His hand jerked down to his coat pocket. Napoleon stopped short as he faced the ugly muzzle of a small gun in the hands of the frightened man.

"Don't come near me!" Dr. Campos-Lopez cried.

"Doctor! We are your friends," Napoleon said soothingly. "We are from U.N.C.L.E."

"I have no friends!" the man cried in a choked voice. "Keep away from me. Take your hands away from your pocket! Don't try to pull a gun on me. I'll kill you if you make a false move!"

"Please, doctor—" Napoleon began.

"Don't move! I'll shoot!" the frightened man warned.

The meteorologist had not seen Illya. Kuryakin moved to the side. He looked around and caught Solo's eye. Napoleon gave a short negative shake of his head. His orders from Waverly was to protect Campos-Lopez, but not to force himself upon the scientist.

The frightened man reached back and pulled open the cab door.

"Take me to the airport!" he said hurriedly. "I'll not wait for the baggage."

He slammed the door, still holding the gun on Napoleon Solo. The uneasy cab driver jerked the car, clashing the gears as he went off.

"Shall I follow him?" Illya asked.

"Yes!" Napoleon said. "Do the best you can, but don't force yourself on him. I'll contact the South American bureau of U.N.C.L.E. and get a Spanish-speaking agent to pick him up at the airport. He—"

"Napoleon!" Illya's sharp cry cut in on Solo's words.

The man from U.N.C.L.E. whirled to see a car dart from a side street just as the fleeing cab turned the first corner away from the hotel.

There was a sudden blaze of gunfire straight into the cab. The horrified men saw the cab careen wildly and plunge into a thick hedge. They started to run toward the wreck. The killers' car spun around in the road. Its headlights flashed full on the two men from U.N.C.L.E.

They split, each diving for the opposite side of the road to divide their attackers' aim.

Napoleon hit the ground, snaking his body around under the doubtful protection of a small evergreen. Across the street Illya Kuryakin took refuge behind a small rock wall. A spray of submachine-gun bullets smashed into the rocks. Illya ducked, sprawling flat to save himself.

THREE

ACROSS THE street Napoleon Solo raised up on his knees and started shooting. He kept his aim low, hitting for the car's tires. The first bullet caught the left rear wheel.

The car swerved as the tire exploded. It plunged straight at the low wall hiding Kuryakin. Solo leaped to his feet, caught in a sudden clutch of fear as the out-of-control vehicle aimed straight at his companion.

Solo caught just the briefest glimpse of Kuryakin as Illya threw himself to one side. The car struck the stone wall, ripping the mortar loose and plunging halfway through before it came to a halt.

"Illya!" Napoleon cried running across the road. "Are you—"

"Look out, Napoleon!"

Solo could not see the cause of Kuryakin's frantic cry, but he knew his companion too well to disregard the warning. He dropped flat, hugging the street curb for what little protection he could get from it.

A gun cracked from the back of the wreck. The slug slammed into the concrete, inches from Napoleon's head. It glanced off at a screaming angle after bringing blood to the man from U.N.C.L.E.'s cheek with a chip of pavement.

Napoleon shifted slightly in order not to present the same target twice. The shot came from the back of the wrecked car. He half raised and fired through the broken rear glass.

A bright red stab of muzzle blast showed him his mistake. The next shot came from under the wrecked

car instead of inside it as he thought. The shot came so close it scraped cloth from the shoulder of Napoleon's coat.

He shot back, aiming for the spot where he saw the muzzle flash. The bullet struck metal and clanged like a bell. Napoleon, realizing their adversary had pulled back, ducked half doubled up and make a dash to the right.

The killer's gun barked again, but his fleeing quarry ducked behind the remnants of the stone wall. Napoleon moved stealthily forward, his gun ready, seeking a target.

He saw a shadow move on the opposite side of the wreck. He raised the gun, but before he could pull the trigger he heard Illya yell again. Once again he couldn't see the new danger, but he flattened against the wall.

Then he heard the roar of a car's engine and headlights cut through the darkness, throwing him into a bright glare of light. He caught just the briefest glimpse of a man's silhouette. He was leaning out the passenger's side of the car. He was holding a sub-machine gun in his hand!

ACT II

THE STRANGE STORM

IT WAS impossible to scramble over the wrecked wall. He would run directly into the other killer's line of fire! In that moment of desperation Napoleon Solo realized that he had only two alternatives. He could crouch there and die—or he could attack!

Either one seemed like suicide, but it was better to go down swinging! He leaped to his feet, bent almost double and charged straight toward the flaring headlights.

The killer cursed loudly and tried to lean far enough out the door to bring the gun to bear on the charging man.

But as he leaned out he presented a target of his own. Solo's gun spat at him, but the jar of running spoiled his aim.

Behind the other wreck the first killer got rattled and started to shoot at Napoleon's running back. The bullet passed over Solo's head with a deadly whine and smashed into the windshield of a car facing the man from U.N.C.L.E.

The driver screamed a frantic curse and shouted for the gunman to stop before he killed the wrong targets. He shoved the car in gear and tried to ram Napoleon. But as the car started Solo leaped on the hood. He shoved his gun through the shattered windshield. The gunman frantically tried to swing his gun around.

The driver twisted the steering wheel frantically. The car swerved, throwing Napoleon on the grass. A burst of fire ripped from the killer's tommy gun, but it flashed up toward the sky as the man was

thrown back by a straight shot from Illya Kuryakin's gun.

Solo twisted around. As Illya raised up to fire the shot that saved Solo's life, he made a perfect target for the first killer still crouched behind the wrecked car.

As Solo twisted about he saw the man rise up. He shot from the ground, without aiming for he realized in that split second of danger that Illya's life hung by a mere thread.

He missed! He shot too fast, but there was no alternative.

The bullet struck the edge of the shattered windshield. The spray of splintered glass showered the crouching gunman. He jumped and his aim was spoiled. The bullet intended for Kuryakin smashed into the ground at the U.N.C.L.E. agent's feet.

Solo whirled as the driver of the stalled car grabbed for the machine gun dropped by his dead companion. As the man raised up, Solo's bullet caught him between the eyes. Napoleon whirled, but it was all over. He saw Illya walking rapidly toward the slumped figure of the other THRUSH agent.

After they made sure neither of the THRUSH men were playing 'possum but were really dead, Solo said crisply, "Keep me covered just in case there's another group following them."

Illya nodded silently. He went over and switched off the car lights so they wouldn't present as good a target if another attack was made on them by THRUSH.

While Solo hurried over to the wrecked taxi to see what had happened to Santos-Lopez, Illya stared at the dead men. For perhaps the thousandth time in his life he wondered about them and the strange organization they served.

THRUSH! An organization so strange no one knew even what its initials stood for. Only one thing was clear about THRUSH. This was that it was composed of a group of men willing and able to use criminal means to affect a dream of world conquest.

Apparently the organization was based in and received support from a certain European country, but it had never been determined that the country's government was behind the organization. Because it operated world-wide, only a world-wide crime fighting group like U.N.C.L.E. could effectively block this super-evil group.

Kuryakin took a deep breath as he considered their narrow escape. Each tangle with THRUSH was more difficult than the last. He wondered, staring at the dead men, where it all would lead.

The blare of a police siren broke his thoughts. He went down to the street to identify himself and make a report to the police. The tough manner of the police changed instantly when Illya flashed his U.N.C.L.E. identification.

He turned as Napoleon Solo

came up. The man from U.N.C.L.E.'s face was grim. Illya did not have to ask him what Santos-Lopez's condition was. Solo's face told him.

"Chalk up another for THRUSH," Illya said bitterly.

"We did the best we could," Solo said slowly. "Unfortunately time was so short we had to approach Santos-Lopez direct. We should have arranged an interview with him through some third party he trusted. He would have trusted us then."

"What do we do now?" Illya asked. "This thing isn't over by any means."

"No, I'm afraid this storm expert's death only complicates what promises to be a bitter battle. I've got to report to Waverly that we failed. Why don't you help the police as much as you can? I'll call New York."

Solo walked over to the broken wall, where he could not be heard by the others. He pulled out his pen-communicator and twisted the cap to extend the aerial. His low spoken call letters were amplified and transmitted instantly to a room high in an office building in New York.

In this office a leathery faced man of indeterminate middle age leaned back in a high backed chair and thoughtfully regarded the steel and glass spire of the United Nations building visible through his window. He was thoughtfully rubbing the bowl of an unlighted briar pipe as he looked at the giant building which represented a large share of the world's hope for tomorrow.

A light flared on a small console recessed in the large mahogany desk in front of him. He turned so quickly he dropped the pipe on the thick rug. In his haste he didn't bother to pick it up. He snapped on a circuit to hear Napoleon Solo's voice identifying himself.

"Mr. Waverly? Come in, please," Solo said from South America.

TWO

ALEXANDER WAVERLY, Section I member and operations chief for U.N.C.L.E., hesitated just a moment to compose himself. He was a human being with a human's worries and doubts, but he tried never to present any face but a composed, confident one to his agents. His personal troubles and uncertainties remained his personal property.

He shared them with no one—not even with the five other men who share with him the terrible responsibility for direction of the giant United Network Command for Law and Enforcement.

It took him but a second to compose himself and shove back his anxiety over this latest and most terrible of THRUSH's threats to the world.

"Yes, Mr. Solo," he said quietly. "Go ahead, please."

In South America the quiet, decisive voice had a soothing effect on Napoleon Solo. Regardless how tough a situation might be, he never failed to feel better about it after hearing Alexander Waverly's quiet, confident voice.

"I'm afraid we have to report a failure, sir," he said.

"What happened?" Waverly asked.

Napoleon gave him a brief but accurate sketch of what they encountered.

"Unfortunate," Waverly said slowly. "But unavoidable, I can see now. Since I called you I received a special report on Dr. Santos-Lopez from our Section IV. Just a moment."

Waverly picked up a yellow teletype sheet marked with the call code of U.N.C.L.E.'s Section IV Enforcement and Communications.

"It says that Dr. Santos-Lopez was extremely suspicious of anyone," Waverly said. "Under the circumstances I doubt that we could have made direct contact with him."

"Shall we remain here and see if we can get his reports on his storm breaking experiments?" Solo asked.

"No," Waverly said. "Our South American offices will be put on that job. I want you—"

He broke off as a brilliant red light flashed on his desk console.

"One moment, Mr. Solo. Stand by. I have an emergency call."

Mr. Waverly punched in a new circuit. A hidden speaker went into action with: "Section III on report."

"Go ahead, Section III," Waverly said. "Switch to Code Line A, since I will retransmit your report to Mr. Solo on the field band."

"Yes, sir," Section III, Enforcement and Intelligence, replied. "News service reports from South America are that the laboratory of Dr. Santos-Lopez was destroyed two hours ago by fire. Another fire of unknown origin broke out in the hotel where he had been staying. It destroyed his baggage."

"Thank you," Mr. Waverly said, cutting the connection to Section III. "Did you get that report, Mr. Solo?"

"Yes, sir. I'd say it is futile to try and find any reports that Dr. Santos-Lopez might have left about his storm destroying work."

"It would seem so," the U.N.C.L.E. chief said slowly. "However, I doubt that he was far enough advanced to provide us a sure kill for any storm generating system THRUSH is working on. That threat is our immediate concern. So you and Mr. Kuryakin report to me here just as quickly as you can get here."

"Yes, sir," Solo said. "There is a regular airline flight leaving here in—"

He glanced down at his watch. "—In forty-five minutes. We can make that quicker than we can charter a special flight."

"I am sure you can," Waverly said. He picked up another piece of paper from his desk. "But there is another flight, the Inter-Hemisphere Airlines, leaving in forty minutes. I have already arranged through Section II for the blocking of two seats on it for you and Mr. Kuryakin. That cuts five minutes from your departure time. I consider five seconds wasted a tragedy. Five minutes compounds the tragedy sixty times. So you will forgive my presumptuousness in arranging a different schedule for you."

"Yes, sir," Solo said, sighing. It was impossible to get ahead of Waverly, he thought wryly.

"Excellent," Waverly said. "We have received new evidence that clearly indicates that my original presumption was correct. THRUSH is experimenting with the creation of synthetic storms—and they are succeeding! Therefore you can see why every second—every second—Mr. Solo—endangers the lives of thousands of people!"

"We'll be on the plane, sir," Napoleon said.

"I'll be expecting you," Waverly replied crisply as he cut the connection.

A police escort got them to the airport with only one of Mr. Waverly's precious seconds to spare. There wasn't even time for them to check out of their hotel. Illya asked the chief of their police escort to inform April Dancer of their sudden departure and to request the girl from U.N.C.L.E. to take care of such details for them.

The two U.N.C.L.E. operatives were the last passengers aboard. Every other seat was taken.

"Sit down here, Illya," Solo said. "I'll take the next one."

But Kuryakin had seen the girl sitting in the window seat farther up the aisle.

"No!" he said, to Solo's surprise. "Age before beauty. You sit here."

He went up the aisle to the other empty seat. Napoleon saw the girl then and his face twisted, wryly.

Solo slipped into the other empty seat, opposite a sour-faced old man. Up the aisle he could see Illya talking with the lovely girl. From what little he could see of her, she seemed to be what Alexander Waverly would describe as buxom in the—er—right places.

He sighed and leaned back in his seat. Between Illya's aggressiveness and Alexander Waverly's impatience, Solo wondered how he would ever get any romance in his life!

THREE

ABOUT THIRTY minutes after they were airborne, the stewardess lowered the lights. The old man beside Napoleon Solo started to snore loudly. Deep breathing showed that others in the plane were also sleeping. Solo found it impossible to doze off himself. He

kept thinking of THRUSH's new weapon.

He had had more than the usual experience with hurricanes and typhoons. He knew that if THRUSH could harness their fantastic fury, U.N.C.L.E.'s great enemy now possessed a weapon capable of doing more damage than any weapon ever conceived.

Napoleon was thinking of the terrible devastation he'd seen only a few months ago when a typhoon hit southern Japan. Not a house remained standing in a hundred mile area.

Surging seas, smashing winds, and torrential rains turned a thriving area into a muddy sea of destruction and death.

As Napoleon recalled it, more than 2,000 people died and losses ran into the millions.

What frightened him was the thought of THRUSH-guided typhoons striking the U.S. coast in areas unused to storms of such frightful nature. Florida was constantly ripped by hurricanes. The people there knew how to batten down the hatches and ride out the blow. But what would happen if a typhoon suddenly struck the coast of Southern California, with its lath and plaster houses? Or Honolulu or Seattle or San Francisco? The destruction would be frightful.

Suddenly his thoughts were shattered by a sickening heave of the flying plane. His head flopped forward. But for the seat belt he would have been thrown across the aisle.

The plane shuddered. It was almost as if a giant hand had pushed against it and the four-motored jet was struggling to fly through the obstruction. Solo had the awful feeling that they had stopped dead in the air.

Then the left wing dipped. He was thrown heavily against the arm rest. The old man beside him neglected to fasten his seat belt. He was thrown over on top of Napoleon.

The plane fell a hundred feet and pulled up with a sickening thud. It rose like an elevator and then dropped again, snapping the necks of the frightened passengers.

Outside, a wild fury of rain beat on the windows. A vivid crack of lightning flashed through the sky, throwing a weird blue light inside the passenger compartment of the beleagured plane. The stewardess switched on the lights to help calm the passengers.

She came down the aisle, obviously a frightened young woman but one bravely trying to hide her fear. The bucking of the plane in the super turbulent air almost threw her off her feet with each sickening heave. But she braced herself, grasping each seat back as she passed in an attempt to keep her balance.

"Please tighten your seat belts!" she cried above the noise of rain, thunder and jets. "Please be calm! There is no danger. We have just run into some turbulence. It will pass in a few minutes!"

Solo watched her in admiration, but Illya Kuryakin did not even glance in her direction. He was too busy with his lovely companion. She was neither brave nor afraid. That is what surprised him. She was furious. Her face was flushed. Her eyes flashed as vividly as the lightning outside.

"Damn them!" she cried, balling her fists and beating on the back of the seat in front of her as an outlet for her fury. "What are they trying to do to me! They should have checked to see which plane I boarded!"

Illya Kuryakin looked at her in astonishment. It seemed like a very curious time to get mad.

He put his hand over and caught her fist.

"Take it easy," he said. "Everything is going to be okay. It's just a strong front."

He raised his voice to make himself heard for the slap of rain on the metal skin of the plane was loud as hail.

But before he finished speaking there was a sudden lull between rain gusts. His loud claim that it was just a strong weather front carried halfway down the passenger compartment.

A man in the uniform of an officer in the U.S. Air Force leaned across the aisle.

"Don't kid yourself, buddy," he said to Kuryakin. "Before I went on military duty in South America I flew hurricane patrols out of Florida. This is no front. It is a genuine hurricane!"

Illya thought so too. His remark was intended to calm the furious girl beside him. Yet the weather report when they left Rio was for calm weather all the way. The meteorological reports might miss a budding storm, but this one was full-blown. Anything so large should have been discovered by hurricane hunter planes.

It was impossible for so large a storm to have gone completely undetected.

But was it?

He remembered what Napoleon

told him regarding the call to Mr. Waverly.

Was this a THRUSH-made storm? That would explain its unusual sudden appearance.

Just then there was another lull in the driving rain. The former hurricane hunter across the aisle leaned over and said to Illya: "There is something very strange about this storm. I know something about hurricanes. This thing is absolutely impossible!"

"How do you—" Illya Kuryakin began, but the full fury of the storm struck the plane again. It was impossible to be heard. He gripped the armrests of his seat as the storm-tossed plane almost went into a loop.

His stomach heaved from the furious up and down motion. He hoped that he wasn't going to disgrace himself before the girl by losing his supper.

There was another short lull between gusts of rain. He heard the officer talking to himself: "It's impossible! There couldn't be a storm like this!"

ACT III

THE STORM GIRL

THE PITCHING of the plane grew more violent. The hard driven rain was becoming hail. The alarm of the passengers increased.

Suddenly the girl unbuckled her seat belt. She stood up, bracing herself by holding to seat in front of her.

"Just a minute!" Illya said to her. "You can't—"

"Mind your own business!" she snapped. "I know what I'm doing. That fool of a pilot is going to get us all killed. I've got to do something to keep alive!"

"All you will do is hinder the pilot," Illya said. "Everything will be all right. These men are experienced—"

"Get out of my way!" she said.

She had the look of a person who knew exactly what she was doing. She stepped over Illya's legs. The plane lurched, but she kept her feet. She started making her way down the aisle, holding to the seat backs for support.

At the end of the compartment the stewardess tried to stop her. The girl brushed on past. The plane almost rolled over. She caught the knob of the compartment door.

Illya Kuryakin unbuckled his seat belt and got up. However, the girl braced herself in time to avoid being thrown off her feet. When the plane righted itself, she opened the door and stepped into the pilot's compartment.

Illya hesitated for a second, then went after her. The wind was becoming gusty. The plane shivered and rolled between moments of comparative calm.

The stewardess half rose from her seat by the compartment door.

"Please, sir—" she began.

Illya patted her shoulder and said, "Don't worry!"

"But you can't bother the pilot at a time like this. He needs to keep his attention on the plane."

"I'm going to get that girl out of there," Illya said. "I—"

"You are from U.N.C.L.E.," she said.

The plane twisted. Every strut and rivet groaning under the strain. Illya could imagine the pilot's struggle to bring them back to an even keel.

"How did you know that?" he asked the girl when he could get his balance again.

"That woman—the one who went in the pilot's compartment. She asked me about you when you first got on the plane. She saw you coming up the ramp and she asked me to make sure nobody took the seat beside her. She wanted one of you to sit there."

"Thanks," Illya said. "Thanks for telling me."

He went on up front, fighting constantly to keep his feet. The tossing of the plane was getting worse. It was building up to the most ferocious storm he ever encountered.

He found the girl standing between the pilot and co-pilot. Both men's uniforms were stained with sweat.

Their faces were strained and tired from the constant struggle to keep the plane from tossing over and losing lift.

"You've got to climb!" It was the girl screaming in the pilot's ear. "These storms only rise about twenty thousand feet. If you can break out of the worst circle of wind, you can rise above it!"

"I've tried!" he yelled back. "I can't gain any altitude. It's taking all our power just to keep out of the sea!"

"Then turn with the wind!" she cried. "Let it carry you—"

"Lady, let me fly the plane, will you? Now get the hell back there in your seat. You're stopping me from—"

"Can't you understand!" she screamed at him. "I know plenty about these storms. I—"

"If you don't get out of here—!" he cried.

She grabbed his arm. The plane pitched to one side. He shoved her and pulled back on the wheel with all his strength in a desperate attempt to bring the nose up.

Illya Kuryakin caught the girl just in time to keep her from being thrown against the control panel. When the plane was half on an even keel again, the angry pilot switched to intercom and called the stewardess.

"Come up here! Get this crazy woman out of here before she wrecks us!"

"You stupid fool!" the girl cried wildly. "You'll kill us all if you don't listen to me!"

Illya braced himself as best he could, and pulled out his U.N.C.L.E.

identification. He flashed it to the startled pilot.

"Better do what she says," he shouted. "I've a hunch she knows more about this thing than any of us!"

"I can't take a chance on hunches!" the pilot yelled back. "I've got a two million dollar plane and the lives of ninety people to think about!"

"Do you think we've got a chance to get out of this alive?" Illya asked. "Be honest. A lot depends on this."

"No," the pilot replied. "This is the worst storm I've ever encountered. We're continually losing altitude. Unless a miracle happens, nothing can keep us from going into the ocean!"

He wasn't a coward. Illya Kuryakin could see that. He just spoke the plain truth based on long experience as captain of an international jet.

"Then try it her way," Illya said persuasively. "Things can't get any worse."

The pilot hesitated. The reputation of the men from U.N.C.L.E. was so great that he nodded.

"I guess you're right," he said. "Things can't get much worse, no matter what we do."

"Thank you!" the girl said breathlessly to Illya. "You can stop worrying now. We'll come out okay. There's a rhythm in these things. If we turn on the pulse, we can make it into the eye!"

He was amazed by her confidence. He moved back to make room for her beside the pilot. As he did, he backed into someone. He turned his head and saw Napoleon Solo.

"I saw you rush up here," Solo said. "So I followed. What gives?"

"I don't know!" Illya said into Solo's ear. "But this girl seems to know more about storms than anyone."

"Who is she?" Napoleon asked.

There was another flash of that frightening blue lightning outside. In the brief glare Illya saw the suspicion on Solo's face as he stared at the girl's back.

"I don't know," Illya said. "But I would like to."

Solo nodded. Together they watched the girl. Her swaying body, slenderly outlined against the glow of the cockpit instrument panel, bent half doubled so she could shout her instructions into the pilot's ear.

TWO

THE WILD turbulence increased in fury. It was beyond anything either of the men from U.N.C.L.E. had ever experienced before. At one point it appeared that the groaning, straining plane would be torn apart. But somehow, it struggled through.

Outside another crash of lightning illuminated the cockpit with a ghostly glare. It shocked Na-

poleon to see how helpless the crew was now. But he was even more struck by the calm confidence of the girl.

As the plane continued to fight the wild wind and rain, the two men from U.N.C.L.E. began to realize that the girl was right. There did appear to be a rhythm to the storm's gusts.

Cleverly the girl was anticipating this stormy rhythm and informing the pilot when to make his banks.

Then suddenly the solid wall of surging clouds was gone from in front of them. The plane's tail gave one last upward loop as they left the circling winds. Then they were flying in still air.

The stars were visible above them, dimming with the approach of dawn. The sea beneath was whipped to an indescribable fury and a circling wall of clouds hemmed them in.

"We're in the eye now," the girl said calmly. "In all storms of this kind the winds circle about a dead section of air known as the eye of the storm. This eye moves along with the hurricane."

"Thanks," the pilot said, mopping his dripping face. "You knew what you were doing. I'm sorry I doubted you, but—"

"Forget it," she said crisply. "My life was at stake here too, you know."

She turned to go back to her seat. As she passed Napoleon Solo, he stopped her.

"This is quite a remarkable thing you did," he said, giving her an engaging smile. Illya noted with amusement that Solo's charm was lost on the young woman.

"How does it happen that you know so much about storms?" Solo asked.

She gave him a steady stare.

"Are you a policeman?" she asked, her voice cold and harsh.

"No," he said quickly.

"Then, until you get your badge, keep your questions to yourself!" she snapped.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I was just curious."

She brushed past him.

He turned to follow, but she slammed the compartment door in his face.

Illya chuckled. Napoleon turned to look at him.

"How many times have I told you to let me handle the pretty girls we meet up with? Girls require finesse, you know. You just confine yourself to masterminds and old ladies. Let *me* handle the young pretty ones!"

Solo gave his partner a sour look.

"Are you a betting man, Mr. Kuryakin?" he said, an edge in his voice.

"Definitely not, Mr. Solo," Illya said formally. "But on occasion I have been known to slap down a chip or two."

"Okay," Napoleon snapped. "I'll bet you a drink when we get to New York that you don't have what it takes to even get her name."

"Mr. Solo, you have yourself a bet! And no fair putting it on your expense account. This has to come out of your pocket, as punishment for doubting my romantic abilities!"

Solo smiled. "Trot back and start your pitch. I've got to call Mr. Waverly. That young lady will bear watching. I want to arrange for a shadow to pick her up when we land."

"Okay, I—" Illya began, but broke off suddenly when the pilot's compartment door opened.

THREE

THE STORM GIRL—as they came to call her—stood there looking at them. Her expression was half angry, half malicious. Obviously she had not gone to her seat, but remained against the other side of the door listening to them talk.

"And I will bet both of you two drinks that neither of you get anywhere with me!" she snapped.

She slammed the door, leaving the two young men looking at each other with embarrassment.

"You made a bet," Solo said. "I'm holding you to it."

"I'll find out who she is," Illya retorted. "She has thrown me a challenge."

He went back to his seat. The girl didn't look at him as he slid into it. She kept staring out the window at the gradually lightening sky. The pilot was circling inside the eye of the hurricane, gaining altitude as he sought to fly over the storm.

Illya Kuryakin felt a curious sense of uneasiness as he stared at her lovely, but determined, profile. He had a peculiar hunch that this woman meant trouble. He couldn't put his finger on the source of his uneasiness. He did not believe her part of the THRUSH organization.

If the storm was an artificial one created to destroy him and Napoleon Solo, it seemed unlikely that a THRUSH agent as resourceful as this one would have been expended.

Then he caught himself with a start. He recalled something that had slipped his mind in the rush of events. This was the angry exclamation of the girl when the storm first broke so unexpectedly.

He shot her a narrow glance. She still had her eyes focused on the swirling clouds outlining the eye of the storm. He recalled her anger.

They should have checked to see which plane I took!"

Those had been her words, as nearly as he could recall them. At the time he thought they referred to

someone who should have seen her off. Now, in view of her extraordinary knowledge of the storm, he wasn't so sure that there wasn't something more sinister behind them.

Still in the pilot's compartment, Napoleon Solo was in contact with Mr. Waverly in New York. He made a hasty report of the unusual storm.

"Yes," Waverly said. "I have just received a report from Weather Central. Everyone is dumfounded by the sudden appearance of the hurricane."

"Was it really artificial?" Napoleon asked. "It seemed like the real McCoy to us in it!"

"There is a real curious thing about this storm, Mr. Solo," Waverly replied. "It is so strange that Weather Central is flabbergasted. They can't understand it. To me that is proof positive that the storm was created."

"What is that, sir?" Solo asked.

"The storm is turning in the wrong direction!"

"What?" Solo asked. "I don't understand."

"Hurricanes and typhoons are the same," Waverly said. "They are both monstrous circling storms, revolving about a calm eye. The difference is that the hurricane is in the Atlantic and the typhoon is the name given to Pacific Ocean storms. There is one other difference and that is what concerns us here."

"And that is, sir?"

"The directions of rotation of these storms are always from right to left on the north side of the equator. On the south side of the equator they revolve from left to right."

"Ours didn't?"

"It did not. You were south of the equator when you were struck. Radar planes from the international weather service have picked up the storm on their scopes. It is circling from right to left. This is the first known case of this ever happening in the history of the weather service."

"That seems to indicate that this might be an artificial storm after all," Solo said.

"Yes," Waverly replied. "Other storms we caught which we feel may also be THRUSH tests behaved normally. The only explanation is that this storm was generated to destroy you and Mr. Kuryakin. I suspect your attempt to contact Dr. Santos-Lopez made THRUSH suspect you knew something about their experiments."

"Do we have any kind of lead as to where these things are generated, sir?" Napoleon asked. His brow creased with worry. If THRUSH had so mastered the elements that it could create a storm of such cyclonic fury, the evil organization was close to being ready to launch a stormy attack as a prelude to destroying the world's governments.

"There is only the smallest possible lead and it may prove false," Waverly said. "A sea-going yacht was spotted off the fringes of two Pacific typhoons. It may be a coincidence or it may have something to do with generating these monstrous things. We are investigating."

"There may be something else," Napoleon said. "We got out of this because of a girl—a rather odd young lady. She showed a surprising knowledge of the storm."

Waverly had his chief enforcement officer describe the girl minutely.

"Hang on a moment," he said. "I want to see what the computer has to say about anyone with that description."

Solo waited impatiently. In UNCLE headquarters the giant computers, storing a fantastic amount of criminal and scientific data ground out Waverly's request in forty-five seconds.

"The description you gave me could fit a young woman named Lupe de Rosa," Waverly said. "Does she have a Spanish look about her?"

"Vaguely," Napoleon said. "But she does not speak with an accent."

"Miss de Rosa has no accent. She was born in California. She was a brilliant student, specializing in meteorology. A paper she wrote brought her to the attention of Dr. Santos-Lopez. She was his assistant until about eighteen months ago. She quit after a quarrel. The quarrel seems to have had something to do with her belief that she was providing all the genius in his experiments while he was taking the credit."

"That could well be this lady," Napoleon said positively.

"If so, please cultivate her," Waverly said. "She could be very important to us. She should know all of Santos-Lopez's secrets. She could be extremely important in helping destroy THRUSH's storm maker."

"Much as I hate to mention it," Napoleon said, "but you may have to call in Mark Slate. This lady is under the present impression that Illya and I are first class bums."

"Well, whatever you have done to give her that impression, undo it at once!" Waverly snapped. "I have a horrible vision of a series of those killer storms striking the United States. Our situation is desperate!"

ACT IV

VANISHING LADY

THE PLANE kept spiraling up, circling inside the still eye of the hurricane. It was growing lighter outside by the minute. Slowly the big jet climbed above the boiling clouds, breaking out into the clear air above the storm.

Several times Illya Kuryakin tried to engage the girl in conversation. She ignored him and kept

staring out the window. After about an hour of this, he got up and went back to see Napoleon Solo. The two men walked up forward, where they could talk without being overheard. Solo quickly filled him in on Waverly's hunch that the girl was the dead meteorologist's former assistant.

"That means she is probably in danger herself," Illya said.

"That is right," Napoleon replied. "And we must do a better job of taking care of her than we did her former boss."

"She has the same opinion of us that he did," Illya said wryly.

"Mr. Waverly will have some people at the airport to help us keep her under surveillance," Solo said. "She is our best lead. If THRUSH strikes at her, we must be prepared."

Illya nodded. "But I wish she would say something to me," he said. "I don't expect a kind word, but she could at least curse me. Anything is better than that frigid silence."

"Try a new tack," Napoleon suggested.

"What?"

"How do I know? Am I supposed to do your romancing for you?"

"Just go back to your seat," Illya retorted. "I'll win that drink from you yet!"

When Illya slipped back in the seat beside the girl, he decided the best thing was a direct, honest approach. The girl was obviously no idiot. Her record as a meteorologist showed that she had brains to match her beauty.

"Miss de Rosa," he said. Her shoulders jerked unconsciously at the mention of her name, but she still did not look around at him. He knew, though, from her unconscious flinch that the name struck home.

"Miss de Rosa," he repeated. "I am sure you heard just before we took off from South America that Dr. Santos-Lopez was killed."

She did not answer, but she started breathing harder. The rapid rise and fall of her breast showed clearly that what he said was having an effect upon her, even though she continued to ignore him.

"We have reason to believe that you might be in similar danger," he said. "Dr. Santos-Lopez was killed because of work you shared with him. We would like to protect you from a similar fate if we can."

She turned then and looked at him. There was an odd light in her deep dark eyes. It wasn't exactly anger, but it was partially that, plus a mixture of exasperation and amusement.

"Mr. Solo—or are you the one they call Kuryakin?"

"Illya Kuryakin, I—"

"Well, Mr. Kuryakin, I do not care to be protected by you or Mr. Solo. I am perfectly capable of taking care of myself! Perfectly capable, thank you!"

She turned back to her absorbed

study of the morning sky. He did not get so much as a glance from her the rest of the flight in to New York.

As they went through customs, Illya contacted Waverly and received word that two other U.N.C.L.E. agents were at the airport to help them watch over the lovely meteorologist. This made both he and Solo feel a little better.

Solo spotted both of them as they came out of customs. He joined the two men for a quick conference while Illya followed the girl out to the taxi stand.

Suddenly she turned to face him. He braced himself for another angry blast, but she fooled him.

"Mr. Solo—or is it Kuryakin?"

"Kuryakin," he explained patiently for the second time.

"Oh," she said with a smile that brightened her face and seemed to give her a new and more inviting personality. "I never could keep names straight! I'm sorry I was so rude to you on the plane."

Illya tried to play down his startled pleasure.

"I'm afraid it was I who was rude," he said. "You had ample reason to be annoyed with me."

"Well I was annoyed. It was the first time I've ever been the object of a bet between two young men. I didn't quite know how to take it."

"I must apologize. It was extremely ill-mannered of us."

"I thought so at the time, but now that I've had time to think about it, I'm not sure but what I should have been flattered."

"Anyway, you had your revenge," Illya said with a grimace. "You caused me to lose."

"If I recall correctly, in my annoyance I made a bet with you."

"You did," he said. "You offered to bet a drink yourself that I wouldn't succeed in learning your name. But I did, didn't I?"

"Yes, and I suppose I must be a good sport and buy you one."

"Why not?" he said quickly.

"I suppose you are going down town," she replied. "Why don't we share a cab? I'm going to Park-Plaza."

"Right on my way!" Illya lied quickly. "Let me get my bag and I'll be right with you!"

He walked hurried back inside the terminal, passing Napoleon Solo who stopped just inside the door to light a cigarette.

"Watch me and learn how to get along with the girls!" Illya whispered quickly as he went past. "Park-Plaza!"

Solo gave no indication that he heard. He finished lighting the cigarette and went over to a phone booth.

Instead of dialing he removed his pen-communicator and called U.N.C.L.E. headquarters.

When he got Waverly, he said, "Illya has made contact with the lady. They are off by taxi to the Park-Plaza to have a cocktail together."

"Excellent!" Waverly said. "Tell Watson and Armat to put a stakeout on her room there. Contact the hotel management and ask their cooperation. We want a twenty-four hour watch on her. However, keep out of sight. This woman is not a criminal. We are protecting her, but we must be positive that we do nothing that can cause her to complain that her right of privacy has been invaded."

"Yes, sir," Solo said and broke the connection.

He walked back outside just as Illya was helping Lupe de Rosa into the cab. He couldn't help noticing the very friendly manner in which she smiled at Kuryakin.

TWO

IN THE CAB Illya Kuryakin found Miss de Rosa exactly the opposite from the silent sphinx of the plane. She talked quite animatedly. On the plane she seemed angry at the world in general, but now her mood had done a one hundred eighty degree turn. He knew that she had made a phone call after leaving customs and before coming out of the terminal. He wondered if this accounted for her change of spirits.

But knowing women, he wondered how long her good humor would last. It took him twenty-two minutes to find out. It was just exactly that long after they left the airport that she said, her voice changing from its feminine chatter to a grim coldness:

"Mr. Solo—"

"I'm Kuryakin!" he said wearily.

"It makes no difference. Do you see this!"

She lifted the bag in her lap. Illya saw a tiny automatic with the barrel directed straight at him. Her finger was on the trigger and she had a business-like expression on her face. It told him she could and would pull the trigger if she had to.

He eyed the gun and quirked his eyebrows up in an exasperated quirk.

"I take it we aren't friends any more," he said.

His voice was light, but his eyes were wary. This woman had shown during the storm that she had nerves of steel.

"Don't move!" she snapped. "And don't try to signal to the car following us!"

Illya Kuryakin leaned back, his eyes half closed, watching the girl.

"Whatever you are up to, I can be more help to you as a friend than as an enemy," he said quietly.

"I don't think so," she said. "You strike me as the kind of person who would be burdened with that most useless of things: a conscience!"

Before Illya could reply to that surprising observation, the girl leaned forward and spoke hurriedly to the cab driver.

"How much longer before those fools are going to stop the car following us?"

"Just after we come out of the tunnel," the driver said, half turning his head. "Don't worry. They'll shoot a razor dart into the car's tires. Then we'll get away before Napoleon Solo can get another cab."

"There were two men with him in the terminal. I saw him signal to them," she said hurriedly.

"Stop worrying! We know our business!" he snapped. "We'll throw them off the track and get you there."

"Mind if I smoke?" Illya said. "Looking down a gun barrel is sort of hard on the nerves."

"Shut up!" she snapped. "There's nothing you can say I want to hear!"

Suddenly the driver floorboarded the cab's accelerator. The car shot forward. Illya glanced in the rear view mirror. He saw the cab carrying Solo dropping back. Tires screeched as their own cab took a corner on two wheels.

The driver went up one block and then took another turn. There was nothing haphazard in his attemps to throw off Solo's pursuit. He drove exactly like a man who has every turn of the wheel plotted in advance.

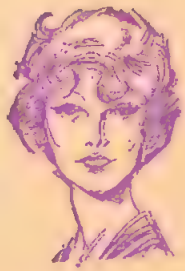
He made two other turns and drove into the garage back of an industrial building.

"Get out!" Lupe snapped to Illya.

"You might say please!" he said, giving her an amused quirk of his lips that definitely did not reflect his inner feelings.

She gave him an angry glance. His casual manner was beginning to worry her. She paused and looked at him sharply. Her indecision was mirrored clearly on her face.

"He's taking this too easy," she said to the fake cab driver. "Do



you think there's still another car following us?"

The driver shrugged.

"You can never tell anything for sure when you're up against these U.N.C.L.E. rats," he said. "They're tricky, Lupe. Just remember that if you expect to pull this deal off."

She nervously bit her lower lip. "Don't let him kid you, lady," Illya said, twisting his own lips in a peculiar grin. "Solo and I are the Laurel and Hardy of U.N.C.L.E. Just a couple of clowns. You don't have to worry about us."

Lupe's face flared. She was goaded to the point of explosion by Illya's mockery—which was what he intended. She suddenly swung her purse at him.

His heart leaped as the purse slammed against the side of his face. It was just what he was hoping for. The blow gave him an excuse to stagger back without causing the driver to jump him. He doubled up and hit the driver's legs.

Lupe cursed, and jerked the gun around to shoot. Illya swung the startled driver and shoved him into the girl. The two hit just as she squeezed the trigger. The jar spoiled her aim. The bullet slammed into the metal cross beams overhead.

Illya caught the driver with a hard knee to the stomach. The burly man collapsed with a choking sputter.

Kuryakin twisted, trying to grab the girl before she could get to her feet.

He caught her arm as she swung the gun toward him. She jerked back, but couldn't tear loose from his desperate grip.

"Now—!" Illya Kuryakin began—and pitched forward on his face.

A tall man slipped the gun he used to pistol whip the man from U.N.C.L.E. back in its shoulder holster. He was breathing hard and all of it was not from running to join the fight. He glared coldly at Lupe de Rosa.

"My dear," he said, his voice heavy with menace, "for all your brilliance as a scientist, you are a complete fool!"

"You can't talk to me that way!" she flared.

The man's bleak face flushed slightly. "Can't I?" he said softly. "Your work with these storms is very important to us, my dear, but in THRUSH nothing is so important as being a member of the team! There is no place in our organization for individualists. If we don't work together, U.N.C.L.E. will destory us. Important as you are, you are worthless to us if we must treat you as a prima donna."

Lying on his face on the concrete floor, Illya Kuryakin could hear them talking. The blow, for all its savagery, had but stunned him momentarily. He half opened his eyes. He could see his assailant's feet. They were close enough that Illya thought he could upset the man. He hesitated because he could not yet place the position of the cab driver. It would be fatal to make a move now.

"And what about your end of the bargain!" Lupe flared. "You almost killed me with that damned storm!"

"We had no idea you were on the plane," he said coldly. "You should have contacted our man in Rio for instructions instead of jumping off on your own. We could have told you not to take that plane. We had already learned that Waverly himself arranged for two passenger seats to be cancelled to make room for Solo and Kuryakin."

"Santos-Lopez tried to treat me like a slave!" she cried. "I don't intend to exchange one slave master for another. I don't have to account to you for every minute of my time."

"You saw what happens when you don't!" he snapped. "You almost got yourself killed. And now you almost made a mess of things by trying to shoot Kuryakin. Can't you understand? Murder must be handled with finesse in this town —especially murder of an U.N.C.L.E. agent."

"He tried to—"

"You were under my surveillance every second. He did not have a chance in the world of harming you," the tall man said impatiently. "I am not going to argue. This is your last chance. Play by THRUSH rules, or you may not play at all!"

"Are you threatening *me!*"

"Call it what you will!"

"I want to talk to Mr. Leach about this! We'll see what he has to say."

"Mr. Leach works for me. He does what I tell him. And you will be expected to do the same!"

Illya Kuryakin couldn't see the girl's face, but knowing her, he was sure that she was furious. It gave him a thrill of anticipation. He was sure now that the girl's resentment of THRUSH's regimentation could be used to his advantage.

He slowly reached his hand around where he could pull his pen-communicator from his pocket. While the man and Lupe were arguing he surreptitiously twisted the cap. The antenna shot up six inches. He pulled the tiny communications set down against his body where it would not be seen, but where it could pick up and pass to U.N.C.L.E. headquarters the incriminating conversation between the girl and her THRUSH boss.

But the only thing he was able to transmit was his own gasp of pain! A heavy boot caught him in the ribs. He doubled up with a groan. The same foot that kicked him ground a heel down on the communicator.

"What is it?" the THRUSH man cried, whirling about.

"He was trying to sneak a fast one, boss," the cab driver said. "Look here!"

"Did he get anything transmitted?" the man asked in alarm.

"I don't know. I don't think so."

"In this business you can't afford to think!" the man rasped. "We've got to get moving!"

"Get this rat into another cab. Get a driver who is expendable. Place some article of Lupe's in the seat beside Kuryakin. Then arrange a wreck. You understand?"

"Yes, sir, Mr. Martin," the driver said hurriedly.

"Good! Don't leave anything to chance. Be sure Kuryakin and the driver are dead. Have a prepared witness to tell the police what happened. Arrange a story that will

look as if the girl was kidnaped and the two men killed by a South American revolutionary group who want the girl's knowledge of storms to help their revolution. Be sure THRUSH is not connected in any way."

Illya only dimly heard the man, Martin, reading his death warrant. He groaned and tried to sit up. Something like volcanic fire burst in his head as he took another savage kick. This time it was against his temple.

He pitched forward on his face.

Martin smiled down at his limp body.

"You see," he said. "The men from U.N.C.L.E. aren't at all the supermen some of our faint-hearted members seem to think. They are just human. They can be hurt and defeated, just as any other human can!"

He laughed softly and turned to the girl.

"You see, Lupe," he said, "you did not make a mistake agreeing to work with THRUSH. Nothing stands between us and total victory except U.N.C.L.E. and you see how we deal decisively with that organization!"

ACT V

"SO LONG, LUPE!"

WHEN THEIR cab's left rear tire started bumping, Napoleon Solo grabbed his pen-communicator.

He quickly transmitted his identification and added, "Mr. Waverly! Emergency!"

"Go ahead, Mr. Solo."

Alexander Waverly's quiet, confident tone was a direct contrast to Solo's clipped anxious voice."

"One moment, sir," Napoleon said. He turned to the two men with him. "Get out quickly! Try to thumb a ride from anyone who will stop for you. See if you can spot where that cab went with Illya and the girl!"

Then into the transmitter, he said hurriedly, "They're getting away from us, sir. The girl suddenly had a change of character and got chummy with Illya. I think now it was a trick. I think she's leading him into a trap."

"What can we do here to help you, Mr. Solo?" Waverly asked.

"I'd like an all-points alarm put out for this cab. You have the number. I phoned it in from the airport. I suspect it is not a regular cab driver. Possibly the cab was stolen. Also I'd like the tri-angular magnetic locators manned. Illya may get a chance to open his communicator. If so, we can get a fix on their location from it."

"Very good, Mr. Solo," Waverly said. "Within five minutes every policeman and every cab driver in New York will be alerted to watch for this car and its passengers."

"Thank you, sir," Napoleon said. "I'll leave my pen-communicator open so you can contact me

instantly as well as keep abreast of all our developments."

"Excellent, Mr. Solo," the U.N.C.L.E. chief said. "I do not understand your statement that Miss de Rosa led Mr. Kuryakin into a trap. Isn't it possible that THRUSH agents trapped both her and Mr. Kuryakin? After all, she was Santos-Lopez's assistant in his storm breaking activities."

"Yes, sir," Napoleon replied. "But it seems to me she had a definite change of character after she made a phone call on landing. Call it a hunch if you wish, but I don't believe she is a victim of THRUSH. I believe she is part of THRUSH."

"Mr. Solo, I personally would never rely on a hunch," Mr. Waverly said severely. "I must have something concrete and definite upon which to base my actions."

"Yes, sir," Solo replied.

"However, that is my personal feeling about my actions," Waverly went on. "I am also aware that on at least three notable occasions your hunches kept us from total defeat. So I am not going to stop you from following any hunch you may have, Mr. Solo."

"Thank you," Napoleon said. "I'll keep you informed, sir."

Traffic was partially stalled behind the stopped cab. Solo looked down the line for a likely car to commandeer. He hit on a hot rod driven by two teenagers as the most likely to give him cooperation. Although an international law enforcement group, he had no power to commandeer a vehicle as the New York City police could do. He could only request.

However, he found the two boys not only willing but absolutely eager to help when he flashed his U.N.C.L.E. identification.

"Gee!" one of them said. "Wait until I tell my girl I'm a genuine man from U.N.C.L.E.!"

"You won't be a man until you're twenty-one," his companion said.

"Just help me pull this off and I'll tell her for you that you're every inch a man and a big one at that!" Napoleon said.

"Hang on, Unk!" the boy cried. He must have been all of sixteen. "*Awaaaaay* we go!"

He took off with a spin of screeching rubber that almost threw Napoleon out of the topless car. They took the corner on two wheels.

"Where to now, Unk?" he yelled back over his shoulder at Napoleon.

"Take a left," Napoleon said, after the slightest hesitation.

"That's a dead end. It leads right down to the river," the other boy said.

"Then make a right," Solo replied. "Another hunch gone wrong. Just keep cruising up one street and down another. It's anybody's guess where the cab went. We—"

The open circuit on the pen communicator in his jacket pocket crackled into life.

"This is Waverly. We have a report. No cabs cross the bridge. They must be holed up somewhere in your neighborhood. We have another report that they did not go back toward the airport. I'm sending seven police cars out to ring in the area. I— Wait!"

Listening tensely to the microspeaker hidden in the fake fountain pen, Napoleon motioned for the driver to stop. Both boys leaned back, fascinated by the tiny communications set.

"Waverly again!" the speaker crackled into life. "Evidently Mr. Kuryakin managed to get his pen-communicator into action for the briefest second!"

"Did we get sufficient reception to do any good?"

"They must have caught him just as he opened the circuit," Waverly said.

His voice still sounded calm to the unpracticed ear, but Solo knew his chief so well he could detect the thin note of anxiety under the outwardly steady voice. In a man with Waverly's self control this was about the same as sheer panic in another's voice.

It told Napoleon Solo how desperate their chief thought Illya's situation was.

"All we got was a gasp of pain from somebody, an angry shout from another, and the briefest snatch of voices in the background but blurred by the louder noises close to the microphone."

"Can the scrambler—" Napoleon began.

"We are working on it," Waverly said crisply. "Also we hope to get a tri-angular fix on the radio reception. There is a bare chance that the directional beam finder can work on so small a reception if we set up the microphone and keep repeating the reception signal. Stay where you are. I'll call you back as the scrambler starts feeding us data. I should have a preliminary report in three minutes."

"Yes, sir," Napoleon said crisply. "We'll stand by."

TWO

A CAR swung around the corner, its lights flashing on them. Napoleon Solo whispered an urgent order for the two boys to duck. He drew his gun from its shoulder holster.

Then he relaxed as he recognized the man leaning out the back window. It was one of the two U.N.C.L.E. agents who had joined them at the airport. Napoleon motioned for him to stop.

"Aw gee!" the younger of the two boys said in a disgusted voice. "No shooting!"

"Relax!" Napoleon said grimly. "You'll get shot at quicker than you need to be!"

He hurried over to the other car for a quick conference. He sketched briefly for his co-agent what Waverly transmitted to them.

"That broken cry on the pen-communicator sounds like Illya got it," the other U.N.C.L.E. man said, his voice grim.

"Don't bet on it," Napoleon said, his voice growing harsh to hide his own grave concern. "Illya's lives can run any cat competition."

"Okay," the other man said. "I'll pull down to the intersection. That way, if we flush them out, we'll be set up where one or the other of us can take off instantly without having to turn around."

Napoleon nodded and went back to the boys in the hot rod.

"What's this scrambler thing?" they asked him, referring to the mysterious reference Mr. Waverly made in his transmission.

"The short reception U.N.C.L.E. headquarters got from Illya Kuryakin was recorded as all calls to headquarters are," Napoleon explained hurriedly. "The scrambler is an electronic means of separating the voices and rerecording each alone."

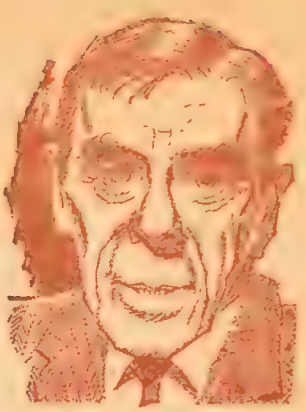
"Then you can tell what each said?"

"Yes," the man from U.N.C.L.E. replied, "but the big question here is how much was received. It might not be enough to do any good."

"Then—!"

"Wait! I'm getting a call from headquarters!"

Napoleon Solo pulled out his transmitter.



"Yes, Mr. Waverly?" he said.

"The first scrambler report is in," Waverly said crisply. "We converted the words unscrambled into oscillograph impulses and compared them with oscillograph voiceprints we have on record. The cry of pain came from Mr. Kuryakin. The curse of the man who evidently struck him is from a known THRUSH agent named Paul Wicker. We are working on the two voices in the background. That is all right now."

"Gee!" said the younger boy, his eyes big. "What's a voiceprint?"

"Everybody's voice has certain tones, just like your fingers have certain print marks," Napoleon explained. "When samples of voices are changed to lines on an electronic oscilloscope these tones show up as distinct marks which can be compared with records. It is as infallible as fingerprints for identification."

Before the boy could reply,

Waverly called again. "The computers were successful in unscrambling the voices in the background. One of the voices is that of Lupe de Rosa. The other is Maxwell Martin. This man is a minor Wall Street stock broker, but we have good reason to suspect that he is an important THRUSH executive in New York."

"Was there enough of their conversation to give us any clue?" Napoleon asked.

"They were discussing the elimination of Mr. Kuryakin through a fake accident. That is all we could get.

The directional finders were unable to get a fix on Kuryakin's transmission."

"What does that mean?" one of the boys asked Napoleon after the Man from U.N.C.L.E. broke the connection with Waverly.

"It means these people are planning to murder their captive. We know they are somewhere in this area, but have no idea where to start looking. You boys know this neighborhood. Where would you go if you wanted a quick hideout?"

"There are some warehouses back on Fourteenth Street near the river," one of the boys said. "The company that owns them shut down about two weeks ago."

"But they have a watchman there," his companion objected. "I know. We tried to get in and he run us off."

"But THRUSH could have bribed the watchman to provide them a quick place to duck into. Apparently this thing was well planned in advance," Napoleon said. "Where is this place?"

"Hang on, Unk!" the youthful driver cried. "*Awaaay* we go!"

Rubber screeched on the pavement and the car shot forward. The hot rod careened around the corner on two wheels in a way that made Napoleon Solo wonder dismally if he wasn't in more danger from the driver than he was from THRUSH.

The car shot down along a railroad track and made another short right. The warehouses loomed dead ahead. The driver braked sharply.

"Do you want to go inside?" he asked.

The man from U.N.C.L.E. shook his head.

"They would spot the car," he said. "Park along the fence. Douse your lights when you drive up. I'll walk in."

"We'll go with you!" the driver said eagerly.

Napoleon hesitated. He knew it was too dangerous for the boys to accompany him. Yet he was reluctant to tell them no after all the help he got from them. He was trying to think of some excuse to send them somewhere else, somewhere they would not be in danger but would feel that they were contributing.

Before he could make a decision, he saw a car move around the corner of the warehouse. It was just after dark, too dark to be driving without lights, but there wasn't the sign of a glimmer from the cab. A bigger car came right behind it. It also had its lights completely switched off.

"Look!" he said hurriedly to the boys. "I can't wait. Take this!"

He shoved the pen-communicator in their hands. "Just talk in the mouthpiece here where this tiny hole is. Tell Mr. Waverly what is going on. Tell him to call all our people and have them surround this area."

"We want to go with you!" the boy cried.

"This is more important," Napoleon said hurriedly. "There are too many for us to handle with only one gun between us. Now get me some help quickly—or a man's life may be lost!"

"Sure thing, Unk!" the boy cried. "Hey, Uncle. Hey, Uncle!"

This last cry was made into the pen-communicator. Napoleon winced as he jumped from the car and ran into the darkness. He could just imagine Alexander Waverly's startled anger at the boy's irreverant cry. But he had no choice.

He could not permit the boys to rush into certain death. He knew that they would follow him regardless of any orders unless he gave them something to do.

THREE

NAPOLEON bent low and ran along the side of the fence. The cab was moving slowly in order not to attract attention. Solo came to the gate. The truck gate was closed, but there was a small personnel gate open. Just beyond it was a guard shack.

Napoleon moved closer, hugging the fence. He could see the shadowy figure of the guard standing in front of the shack. The small personnel gate was ajar, but when Napoleon pushed on it, the unoiled hinges squeaked.

The guard whirled. Napoleon saw the silhouette of the gun in his hand.

"Who's there?" the guard said in a harsh voice.

"Quick!" Solo cried. It didn't take much acting ability to put a lot of agitation in his voice. "Where are they? There isn't a second to lose. Those rats from U.N.C.L.E. are on to us!"

"What!" the guard cried. "Mr. Martin told me this was perfectly safe when I agreed to let them use this place. I don't want to get in any trouble!"

Napoleon Solo hesitated, wondering if he could trust the man to help him. He decided it was too much of a risk.

"Come here," he said.

When the guard walked closer, Napoleon's hand flashed up and hit him against the temple with the

butt of the gun. Solo caught the guard as he fell. He pulled the man into the shack. Then he turned and scooped up the fallen man's gun. He shoved it into his coat pocket.

The two cars were coming closer. The driver of the cab stuck his head out and snarled, "Hurry up and get that gate open! We haven't any time to lose!"

"Okay. Keep your shirt on!" Napoleon replied in a muffled voice. "I'm coming as fast as I can."

He shuffled across the road, imitating the guard's dragging walk. He pulled open the gate and started to swing it back. Then before the driver could put the cab in gear, Solo leaped forward. He swung the gun in a vicious blow.

The driver squalled and tried to duck. The blow caught him on the side of the head. He slumped over the wheel. Solo whirled. The big limousine behind stopped with a squeal of brakes. The darkness was split with the red stab of muzzle blast. A bullet just missed Solo. It struck the car fender and carreened off with a deathly whine.

Solo dropped flat on the pavement to present as small a target as possible. He jerked up his own gun, but the trigger stuck. The blow he struck the driver had broken the trigger spring.

He twisted frantically, rolling back under the stalled cab. It was a moment of extreme danger. If the driver recovered and started the car, he would be run over.

He dug in his pocket for the guard's gun. It was a bigger, heavier .45 caliber. Solo's own gun was a snubnosed .38, carried because its smaller size would fit more unobstrusively under his coat. He wished desperately he had the supremely accurate U.N.C.L.E. gun, but its bulk prevented it being carried on the person.

He pulled himself up against the left rear wheel. The driver of the limousine and his woman companion did not try to escape by driving away. That made Solo suspect that Illya was a prisoner in the cab.

This supposition was borne out when he heard the man yell at the girl: "Hurry! The shots will bring the police in a few minutes! Take this package of gas tablets! I'll keep that U.N.C.L.E. rat pinned down! Throw one of these pellets in the back of the cab. Suffocate our prisoner. He may have heard too much and can incriminate me. We've got to remove him."

"Okay!" the girl gasped. "How do I use them?"

"They're glass. Just throw one inside. Hurry! We haven't a second to lose!"

The two split, coming on opposite sides of the car. Napoleon groaned. There was no way he could cover both sides of the car. He tried to move toward the side the girl was approaching, but a

bullet ripped the air at his ear. He whirled and fired back, but his shot went wild.

He whirled. He saw the girl's ankles. It was all of her he could see of her from his position under the car. He realized then that he made a tactical error in climbing under it. He would have been better off taking his chances in the open. That way he could have maneuvered. Now he was completely pinned down!

He tried to draw a bead on Lupe's ankles, hoping he could knock her off her feet before she could hurl the suffocating gas in on top of Illya Kuryakin.

But she moved too quickly. The right wheel got between them. He tried to snake his body around for a better shot, knowing that he was exposing himself to a deadly shot from the gun of Maxwell Martin. It was a chance he had to take. Otherwise his U.N.C.L.E. partner would die!

As he turned he saw the girl stagger back. He couldn't understand what hit her. Maxwell Martin also was so startled that he whirled to face this new danger without shooting at the exposed Napoleon Solo.

Solo, suddenly suspecting the truth, ignored the girl. He whirled and fired at Martin. The THRUSH man staggered, falling with a wailing cry.

Solo rolled the rest of the way from under the cab. He saw Lupe stagger to her feet. She was holding a handkerchief to her nose. A greenish phosphorescent cloud was swirling about her. In her fall she broke the suffocating gas bulb.

Solo took a deep breath and held it as he whirled to aid his companion in the back of the cab. The cab door was open. Kuryakin lay on the floor. It was obvious to Napoleon what had happened.

Although bound, Illya managed to pull down the door handle to open the door, but keeping it pulled closed. Then, when the girl approached to drop the gas pellets inside, he kicked the unlatched door with his bound feet. The unexpected blow knocked her back and down against the pavement.

The extreme danger was not over. The gas cloud was a terrible threat to the bound man. Illya sat up. Napoleon gasped out a quick order for his partner to hold his breath.

He grabbed Kuryakin about the middle, pulling him from the cab. Then, swinging his co-agent up over his shoulder in a fireman's carry, Solo staggered back away from the poisonous green cloud.

He dropped Illya beside the guard shack. Kuryakin was bound hand and foot. He had a gag in his mouth. Solo jerked out the gag and cut the bonds on Illya's wrist.

"You can get out of the rest," he said hurriedly. "I'm going after Lupe. She's getting away!"

"Let her go!" Illya gasped. "If

she's free, there may be a chance we can follow her to the THRUSH cell operating this storm gimmick."

"You're right," Napoleon said. "I'll shadow her. Are you in shape to come along?"

"Get moving!" Illya snapped. "Don't waste time on me. I'll be right behind you!"

But before Solo could leave, one of the hot rod boys yelled from the gate: "We got her! We got her! Hey, Mr. Uncle! We got the woman who was running away!"

"Who's that?" Illya asked, getting to his feet after cutting his leg bonds.

"Two boys helping me," he said exasperated. "They are *too* much help!"

"Yell for them to let her go!"

"No," Napoleon replied. "We'll have to think of some way to let her escape. Otherwise she will know we released her just to follow her to the THRUSH headquarters."

Illya rubbed his wrists. He said wryly, "You can always get more than enough help when you don't need it any more!"

"Oh, don't start blaming the boys. They thought they were being helpful. And they were helpful. It was their idea that you might be here. Otherwise we might not have found you in time."

"Then I change my mind," Kuryakin said with a grin. "There is hope for the younger generation!"

"And I'd say there is hope for the older generation to muddle through while we have kids like these to help us!" Napoleon said with a grin. "I'm going to ask Mr. Waverly to write them an official U.N.C.L.E. letter of commendation. I'll mean a lot to them."

"And I want to add my thanks at the bottom," Illya said. "I was in one tough spot."

ACT VI

WATERLOO?

AFTER THANKING the boys for their help, Napoleon Solo promised them they would be receiving an official letter from Mr. Waverly. Then he and Illya Kuryakin took Lupe into the dead Maxwell Martin's car.

Solo made quite a show of holding the gun on the girl to keep her from escaping. She looked at it and shuddered.

"M-must you point that terrible thing at me?" she said.

Solo smiled.

"I'm sure you aren't tough enough to overpower both of us," he said.

He slipped the .38 special into his pocket. This was his own gun, the one he had fouled when he struck the guard and the cab driver. The .45 he took from the guard was passed to Illya, who slipped in the front to drive the car.

"Please!" Lupe said breathlessly. "Things are not the way they

seem. I know it seems to your Mr. Solo—"

"Kuryakin," Illya said wearily.

"—Mr. Kuryakin that I was aiding Mr. Martin," she went on. "But it isn't true. You see, I knew what they did to Dr. Santos-Lopez. I had to play along with them to protect myself. I was just trying to find out how they are able to generate these terrible storms. Then I intended to call the police."

"I hope your story checks out, Miss de Rosa," Napoleon said. "Of course that is outside our department."

She leaned breathlessly close to him. In the front seat Illya watched her performance with a cynical eye.

"But you believe me, don't you?" she whispered.

Her hand touched his arm in a pleading manner.

Illya Kuryakin watching in the rear view mirror, smiled cynically as her hand dropped suddenly, grabbing the unworkable gun from Solo's pocket.

She jumped back against the opposite side of the car, shakily pointing the gun in a wavering arc that included both Kuryakin in the front seat and Solo across from her.

"Stop the car!" she snapped.

Illya braked to a stop. Watching her closely, Napoleon wondered if they were doing right in letting her get away.

"Get out of the car!" she snapped to both men. "Get out or I'll shoot."

Solo hesitated, but Kuryakin said, "Come on, Napoleon. You've met your Waterloo!"

"What's that? What's that?" the girl cried in a strangled voice. "How did you know—"

She broke off. "Move faster!" she said through clinched teeth. "I haven't got time to fool with you now!"

The two men stepped down to the curb. They stared after the car as she sped off. Napoleon looked at Illya in surprise.

"What brought on that last outburst?" he asked.

"You got me," Kuryakin said. "Apparently she has a phobia about the word Waterloo. I don't know why she should be bothered by it. If I recall correctly, that was where another Napoleon took his worst defeat. The word should bother you, not her."

"Remember this letting her go was your idea," Solo said. "I'm beginning to wonder if she is safe to let run around. For my money she is a genuine kook."

"I don't know," Illya said thoughtfully. "I just hope those two keep her in sight."

"They're good men, both of them. They caught my signal as she pulled away. They'll do as good a job sticking to her as we could. Better, perhaps. She knows us and they are strangers to her—I hope."

"What do we do now?" Illya asked.

"I'll call Mr. Waverly."

He tuned in the pen-communicator and reported their actions to the U.N.C.L.E. chief. Waverly gave them instant approval of their gambit in permitting the Storm Girl to "escape."

"Mr. Kuryakin is right," Waverly said. "We have no lead to the THRUSH cell operating this storm generator. This girl should be able to lead us to them."

"I hope so," Napoleon said. "But I keep remembering the cool, smart way that girl reacted when it looked like our plane was going down in that hurricane. She has brains and courage. We must not underestimate her."

"I agree, Mr. Solo." Alexander Waverly's calm voice said.

"And, sir—" Illya put in.

"Yes, Mr. Kuryakin?"

"Does the word 'Waterloo,' in connection with this case, mean anything to you, sir?"

Just the faintest note of surprise broke the calmness of the U.N.C.L.E. chief's voice. "As a matter of fact, Mr. Kuryakin, it does!"

"What is it, Mr. Waverly?" Solo put in. "Illya mentioned the name as a pun on my own name. This girl, Lupe de Rosa, seemed quite disturbed by it."

"I fancy she might well be," Waverly said. "Let the New York unit keep track of Miss de Rosa. You gentlemen report to me here at U.N.C.L.E. headquarters as rapidly as possible! Our situation is growing more grave by the second. It is far worse than when I spoke to you at the airport. We have received additional information that indicates THRUSH is ready to strike!"

TWO

AFTER THEY broke their connection with Waverly, the two men from U.N.C.L.E. walked soberly to the main intersection, where they stopped at a drugstore to phone for a taxi.

Neither of the spoke much on the drive over to Manhattan. They were both deep in thought most of the time, trying to piece together the puzzling series of facts they faced these last twenty-four hours.

They dismissed the taxi in the lower fifties and headed in a fast walk back toward the United Nations building towering darkly against the night sky by the East River.

But instead of continuing on, they made a sharp turn and walked past a whitestone building in the middle of the long block.

A tailor shop was still open in

the basement. Solo said to his friend, "We look a sight. We'd better get a press before we report to the boss."

Illya Kuryakin nodded. The two turned and went down the short flight of steps. Solo pushed open the door marked "*Del Floria—Tailor*" and the two went in. A little man past middle age rubbed his hands on his tailor's apron and nodded to the two.

The two men walked to the back of the shop. They entered a small dressing room and let the curtain drop behind them. They paused for a moment while a cleverly concealed electronic eye scanned them. Then the back of the dressing room wall swung in. Napoleon and Illya stepped out of the old world tailor shop into a modern, well appointed reception office.

A smiling girl at the desk asked them to place their hands on a frosted glass on her desk. She pressed a button and their prints were electronically verified from master records in the banks of computers jammed in the long steel corridors of the ultra-modern offices hidden behind the prosaic whitestone front.

Only after a verification signal from the identifications computer buzzed on her desk, did the admissions clerk give each of the two men a peculiarly shaped triangular badge to pin to their lapel. Electronic scanners would instantly sound an alarm if anyone not wearing the U.N.C.L.E. badge tried to enter any of the hundreds of top secret rooms in the headquarters.

They walked down the gleaming hall to an elevator. They took it to a top floor, walking across to a door whose oak appearance was a clever lamination. It was actually solid steel.

Solo pressed a recessed button beside the door. There was a faint buzz inside, as scanners checked their identity. The door slid noiselessly into its recess.

Across the room Alexander Waverly sat behind a desk that was in reality an elaborate communications console. At a flick of any of the rainbow colored buttons he could put himself in contact with any of the world-wide network of U.N.C.L.E. operatives.

He was watching a TV screen set in the desk. He did not look up, but said, "This will interest you. It is the aftermath of the storm that almost got you!"

Waverly pressed a button. The picture was transferred from his private screen to a giant one revealed in the opposite end of the room as the wall rolled back in obedience to his electronic command.

"This is the Bahamas after this freak storm struck it," Waverly said, motioning toward the screen.

The two men saw what appeared to be view of an island from a low flying airplane. The island was a wreck. Docks were smashed. Boats

were driven as much as a half mile inland. Palms were stripped and houses were smashed like kindling wood. As far as the eye could see there was death and destruction.

"We can expect a similar disaster along the entire Pacific and Atlantic coasts," Mr. Waverly said. "I have been discussing the possibilities with meteorologists. They tell me that if a series of storms as ferocious as this one struck at strategic points about the world, it would bring the entire earth's governments to a standstill."

"Do we have any indication of THRUSH's intentions, sir?" Solo asked as the screen went dark. He and Illya Kuryakin turned to face the grim faced man behind the communications console desk.

Waverly thoughtfully rubbed the bowl of an unlighted pipe against the sleeve of his tweed jacket.

"Yes," he said slowly. "Our sources within THRUSH informs us that the plan is to throw a chain of these monstrous disturbances at the United States, Europe, and Asia. England, France, the Netherlands, the Mediterranean countries, India and Japan are expected to take the worst of the strike. All the storms will hit simultaneously."

Solo said, his face mirroring the horror he felt, "We can expect two *billion* people to die. That is more than have died in all the wars ever fought since the beginning of history!"

Waverly got up suddenly and strode to the large window. He stood for a long moment staring out over the lights of Manhattan. He whirled to face his two agents.

"Gentlemen, I am not sure you realize fully what this can mean. You feel that these steel and concrete monsters our architects have raised can withstand the fury of any storm.

"You are right. They can. But if twenty storms the strength of this latest one were to strike twenty separate spots about the globe at the same time, it would lash the seven seas into such a fury that tidal waves would be monstrous.

"Typhoons and hurricanes are ocean storms. That many simultaneous cyclones would pile up tidal waves so high water would pour through these man-made canyons to a height of twenty feet at least!"

"Don't we have any leads?" Illya asked, the edge in his voice mirroring his growing desperation. "What do our—sources in THRUSH tell us."

"Only that the cyclonic weapon is being handled by a special cell. Nobody can tell us where or how it operates," Waverly said in a resigned voice. "This girl, Lupe de Rosa, is our only solid lead. And it is possible we may have another very slender one in—the *Waterloo.*"

"What is the *Waterloo?*" Napoleon asked.

"It is a ship—a private sea-

going yacht," the U.N.C.L.E. chief said. "We do not know for sure that it is connected with these storms, but it was observed on the fringes of two which sprung up unexpectedly in the Pacific. It is possible that this ship was directing the storm's movement. We are not sure, however."

"Could we ask the Coast Guard to stop and inspect it?"

"It is not registered under the flag of any country with which we have official contact," Waverly said. "To board this ship without permission of the country involved is piracy under the laws of the high seas. You will recall that the American War of Eighteen Hundred and Twelve was fought over the principle of one country inspecting the ships of another."

"Have we contacted this country for permission?"

"Yes—and was refused."

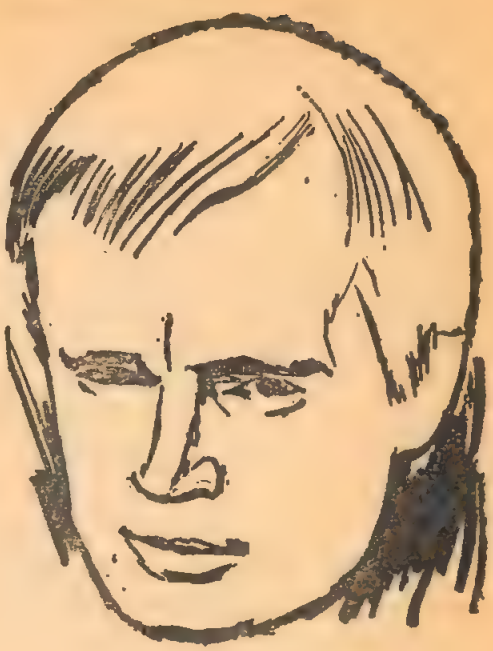
"Is this the same country where THRUSH headquarters is located?"

"Yes!"

"Then that would indicated definite grounds for your suspicions," Solo said.

"It does. Therefore, Mr. Napoleon Solo, your next job is to find out what is happening on the *Waterloo.*"

He turned to Illya. "Mr. Kuryakin, your job is to follow this girl who knows so much about storms. It is my supposition that she will eventually contact the *Waterloo.* At this point you will team with



Mr. Solo to fight a new Battle of Waterloo. At that time we will have at your disposal the entire resources of U.N.C.L.E. This threat is that important."

"Very well, sir," Solo said, getting up.

"The *Waterloo* last made port in Honolulu," Waverly said. "I suggest you start there. See if you can pick up any information that might have been inadvertently dropped by any member of its crew."

"With his luck," Illya said with a grimace, "he'll run into a grass-skirted hula girl who has all the information. While I'll be tangling with a girl who goes around hitting me on the head with a gun—when she isn't trying to shoot me!"

A red light flashed on the emergency circuit on Alexander Waverly's desk.

"Yes? Waverly here."

The two men saw their chief's face grow bleak. Waverly hunched forward in his chair. His hands clinched momentarily into white-knuckled fists before he got command of himself. Then he leaned back in his chair, once more the human machine who directed the world's greatest crime fighting organization.

Solo and Kuryakin waited tensely. On emergency calls the first call came on a secret earphone monitor so that no one could hear expect the chief himself.

Waverly, after his first review, touched a switch which opened the circuit to a loud speaker so his two top men could hear.

"How could something like that possibly happen?" Waverly said.

"She just outsmarted us, is all I can say, sir," the unhappy reporting voice said. "We followed her to Manhattan. She registered at the hotel and then went to a late movie. We followed her inside. She went to the ladies room on the mezzanine floor and did not come out."

"So?" Waverly said.

"We got the janitoress to investigate for us. Apparently Miss de Rosa climbed out the window which the theater staff uses to change the billing."

"At this time of night there are not many people on the streets," Waverly said. "A pretty girl like her would certainly attract attention walking alone. Call in all the assistance you need. We must find her!"

"Well, she didn't go on the street," the agent said, his voice sounding even more unhappy. "She came back in the theater and went into the ladies room on the ground floor. There we found her dress and the broken tooth of a comb. From this we surmise that she changed clothes and altered her hairdo. It is quite possible she walked right past us without any of us being aware of it."

Waverly leaned back and sighed.

"There goes our best lead!" he said bitterly. "If the *Waterloo* lead frizzles out, we really are in a fix!"

ACT VII

GIRL IN THE DARK

FOR THE next five minutes, Alexander Waverly sat hunched over his control panel, issuing a string of orders that diverted the world-wide facilities of U.N.C.L.E. to cope with this new emergency.

Every international airline office was covered, both in the United States and abroad. A complete physical description of the girl was transmitted. Each operative had orders to get a voice sample of any woman who outwardly

resembled the fugitive in the slightest manner. This was to be transmitted immediately to U.N.C.L.E. headquarters, where it would be transcribed into a voiceprint for comparison with the master prints of Lupe de Rosa's voice.

In the meantime teams of investigators tried to track down any person who may have seen a woman leaving the Broadway theater at about one in the morning.

Dozens of leads turned up and were proven false. Hundreds of voice prints poured into U.N.C.L.E. headquarters. In no case did the jagged oscillograph lines match those on file of Lupe de Rosa.

Both Solo and Illya were anxious to join the search, but Waverly insisted on keeping them with him. Then after an hour he sent them down to the headquarters dormitory to get some rest. Because of the excitement and urgency, both had difficulty getting asleep. They had just managed to drop off when Waverly summoned them again.

They found the U.N.C.L.E. chief standing at the window looking out over the dawning skyline of the city. He turned when they entered.

"We have not been successful," Waverly said, coming back and seating himself at the console desk. "That leaves us only one alternative. We must proceed according to the law of probabilities."

Illya grimaced. To him this reliance on mechanical computers to analyze a situation and give a probable answer based on the evidence was little better than a hunch. Although he had seen it work many times, he was never fully convinced that they would not sooner or later come to disaster by relying on what he called "the might-to-be."

Waverly caught the twist of the little man's face.

"Do you have a better suggestion, Mr. Kuryakin?" he asked.

"No, sir, not at the moment," Illya said.

"Then proceeding on the probabilities is better than not proceeding, isn't it?" Waverly asked.

"Yes, sir," Illya said, but his voice still held an element of doubt.

"Well, I have had all the known facts about this synthetic storm affair fed into the computers. This includes all the data we have on what appears to have been THRUSH's tests, all the information and rumors we have picked up from our spy sources within THRUSH, and all known information on Miss de Rosa. We also fed in what little we know about the *Waterloo.*"

"And the answer, sir?" Napoleon asked. He had much more faith in the law of probabilities than his friend.

"The computer indicates that there has been more activity in the Atlantic than in the Pacific. This indicates that THRUSH has not been as successful in breeding typhoons

as they have in originating hurricanes. They are the same, of course, except one originates in a different section of the globe. This trouble may arise from some climatic condition in the Pacific which is giving THRUSH trouble.

"The computer then gives us the probability that THRUSH will shift its full operations to the Pacific to solve this problem. It is essential to any storm-weapon plan that THRUSH be able to strike simultaneously all over the world. The probability also is that Miss de Rosa will go immediately to join the *Waterloo*."

"Is there any indication what this girl's role is exactly?" Solo asked.

"None," Waverly said. "As Santos-Lopez's assistant, she presumably knows a lot about his work in destroying storms."

He got up and faced his two top agents. "Gentlemen, you will leave for Honolulu immediately. I'll expect a report from you from there at three this afternoon."

"Three!" Illya said. "That's impossible. The—"

"Mr. Kuryakin!" Waverly said severely, "Impossible is a perfectly good word for anyone except an employee of U.N.C.L.E.!"

"Yes, sir!" Illya said.

Waverly extended his hand, first to one of the men and then to the other.

"Good-by—and good luck!"

In the hall Illya said to Solo, "You're the brains of this team. How do we get to Honolulu by three? By taking a helicopter to Kennedy International Airport we can just make connections on a jet to San Francisco. But what do we do there? I'm familiar with the schedules on Honolulu flights. We'll have a two hour layover in Frisco."

"Don't hand me your problems!" Napoleon retorted. "You are supposed to make the 'difference,' aren't you?"

"It's your problem as well as mine!"

"Is it?" Napoleon said with a smile. "It seems to me that Mr. Waverly told you to report at three. He said nothing about me"

IN SAN FRANCISCO the two men from U.N.C.L.E. went directly to the airline ticket counter to check their reservations for the first flight out to Hawaii.

"I'm sorry," the young lady behind the counter said, "but your reservations were cancelled from New York."

"When Waverly pulls a joke to relieve the tension, he doesn't know when to stop," Illya complained. "What do we do now?"

"Excercise your ingenuity, as Waverly would say. Don't worry me with your problems. You have to make the three o'clock report."

"I don't—"

"Are you Mr. Kuryakin?"

Illya turned. A young man in the uniform of a technical sergeant in

the U.S. Air Force was at his elbow.

"Yes," Illya said, brightening. "And which general are you?"

He smiled. "You're early by a few years. It takes a while to become a general. We are holding a plane for you. A Mr. Waverly, who really must be some big shot to arrange this, made a request through the department of defense for us to wait for you."

Illya Kuryakin looked crossly over at Napoleon Solo, who grinned back.

"He could have told us and saved me a lot of worry," he said.

"Just Waverly's idea of a joke. A tension reliever, you know!"

"Well, I didn't have any tension until he started that report-by-three stuff. You know Waverly never says anything even as a joke unless he means it. When he said report by three, he meant it."

"Let's not keep the sergeant waiting," Napoleon said.

They followed the airman out to an Air Force jet bomber. They learned from the pilot that it had been in the States for installation of weather equipment. It and the crew were being transferred to Hawaii to fly weather reconnaissance.

"Are you what they call hurricane hunters?" Illya asked.

"No," the pilot said. "Hawaii is outside the typhoon belt. Our job will be to chart air masses below Hawaii and off the usual line of air traffic. Airline planes send back sufficient weather reports along their route, but we'll be covering an area where there is practically no air traffic."

"Why do that?" Illya asked.

"Several storms apparently popped up unexpectedly in that area recently," the pilot said. "Nobody knows why. We are supposed to look into it. Probably some freak atmospheric condition."

"Probably," Solo said and looked at his companion.

TWO

ON THE FLIGHT over to Honolulu, both men spent all their time with the crew's weather observer. By the time the weather plane's wheels touched down at Honolulu International Airport,

they both had a thorough working knowledge of typhoons and tropical storms.

It was exactly three when they walked into the terminal at the air base. Illya Kuryakin stepped into a phone booth for cover and used his communicator to send a report of their arrival to Waverly in New York.

"Excellent," the U.N.C.L.E. chief said. "I have additional information for you. We have received a fix on the *Waterloo*. It is just above the equator in the central Pacific. Apparently it is heading toward either the Ellice Islands or the Gilberts. However, the Pacific in this area is studded with tiny atolls, many inhabited by natives and many barren."

"Then the ship could be headed for some secret THRUSH station on one of these tiny islands," Illya said.

"It is possible. Arrangements have been made for the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Air Force to step up their weather flights into this area. Although there are no storms reported in the vicinity of the *Waterloo,* we want to keep a close eye on the ship's activity."

Illya gave Napoleon a terse summary of Waverly's report. Solo grunted.

"Well, I guess this is where the trail forks, as they say in those Western movies on the TV late show," he said. "I've got to hunt a ship while you get to trail a pretty girl. It's obvious which of us Waverly is partial to!"

Illya Kuryakin grinned. "He just recognizes talent when he sees it," he said. "He knows what each of us does best."

The two men met the next evening to compare notes. Illya reported a complete blank on the girl. He found evidence that four separate women who might have been her landed at Honolulu International Airport. Two checked out to be vacationing school teachers. One left by another flight to Bali, while the fourth apparently disappeared.

"If it were me, I'd forget the disappearing dame," Solo said. "I'd check out those two school teachers. This is October. It's a peculiar time for school teachers to be vacationing."

"I did," Illya Kuryakin said ruefully. "One turned out to be a private detective chasing an errant husband. The other is a disguised woman reporter chasing the same story but for a different reason."

"Oh!" Solo said.

"See, what did I tell you? Leave the women to me."

"Apparently so," Solo said sadly. He had just smiled at a pretty girl in a trim airline stewardess uniform and gotten a frosty stare. "Chasin 'shes' with stately lines and sails doesn't seem to be in my line either. All I can learn is that the *Waterloo* put in here a month

ago for refueling. The crew was exceptionally close-mouthed. I've been unable to find anyone who has any idea what the ship is up to."

"Well, tomorrow's another day," Illya said. "I'm going to check the steamship lines in the morning. We get in such a habit of flying we forget there are ships. This stormy kid could have taken a boat."

"Boy!" Napoleon said with mock admiration. "Are you smart!"

Suddenly Illya leaned forward. They were seated on a lanai ringed with flickering luau torches. He shaded his eyes with his hand to keep the light out of his eyes. Solo turned to see what his companion was staring at. The lanai with its thatched palm roof fronted on Waikiki's Kalakaua Avenue. All he could see was the rear view of a shapely woman going away from them.

"Don't be so obvious in your girl watching, chum," he said reprovingly.

"There's something decidedly familiar! I'll be back as soon as I get a closer look at her."

"Maybe," Solo said cynically.

"Pay the check for me, will you?" Illya flung back over his shoulder.

"So *that's* it!" Solo said, smiling, as he leaned across the clipped hibiscus hedge to watch Kuryakin follow the girl.

His eyes narrowed thoughtfully. For all his banter, he had more than the average respect for his partner's ability. He did not himself get as good a look at the girl as Kuryakin had. Like any good investigator seeking for a missing person, he did not expect to find them looking just like their pictures.

But certain things cannot be disguised. Hairdos can be altered. The shape of lips changed by curving lipsticks slightly. Different types of clothing can alter the outward appearances of personality. However, basic bodily shapes are difficult to alter. The way a person walks. The tilt of the head. And a hundred other little mannerisms are more tell-tale than the obvious features.

When Solo leaned out to look down the street the girl was out of sight. He glimpsed the back of Kuryakin just vanishing into the darkness. Solo grunted and started to turn back when his attention was arrested by the shadowy shape of two men who stepped out on the sidewalk behind Kuryakin.

Napoleon hesitated for a fraction of a second. The sudden appearance of the two men did not necessarily have a sinister meaning, but deep inside one of his famous hunches was nudging him into action.

"When you deal with THRUSH it is better to be safe than sorry," he muttered.

He motioned to the waitress, who glided up with a sway of her hips under the grass skirt which was more tourist than genuine Hawaiian. She smiled brightly.

"I wish I had time to enjoy that smile," he said with a sad grin. "But I got to run. Is this enough to cover the bill?"

He handed her a twenty.

"And enough to leave a tip that will make you more than welcome any time you want to come back!" she said, her scarlet lips smiling out of her tanned face.

"I hoped I'd be welcome for some other reason," he said and closed his eye in a sly wink.

Her smile broadened.

"You will be!" she said.

She sighed when he jumped over the hibiscus hedge to the street and strode rapidly away without a backward look.

Solo followed the two men for a couple of blocks. They kept their distance behind Kuryakin. Napoleon could not tell for sure if they were following his partner.

They left the more brightly lighted section of Waikiki and the girl cut across Kalakaua Avenue at Fort DeRussy, the Army's Waikiki rest center. Kuryakin, after a pause to make sure she did not see him, crossed over behind her. The two men continued down on the east side of the street.

Solo shrugged and turned back, sure now that they were not following Illya. But in the middle of the block he glanced back. The two shadowy figure were crossing now. Solo stopped, his heart starting to beat rapidly. He could not see either Kuryakin or the girl.

Apparently the two shadows waited until Illya was out of sight before crossing. This marked them as professionals who knew how to divert attention.

Napoleon reached for the gun in his shoulder holster. He slipped it in his jacket pocket and kept his hand on the butt and his finger on the trigger.

He hurried after the shadowy figures. He caught just a glimpse of them turning up a side street toward the beach. In the distance he could see a beach hotel.

The two men cut suddenly down a path running across a small park to the right of the street. It was obvious to Napoleon Solo that they intended to flank Kuryakin.

He started after them. They were out of sight behind a thick stand of ornamental bamboo. He advanced cautiously.

There was always the possibility that they had spotted him following them.

But when he came around the bend he saw one of the men just disappearing around another turn in the park path. He started forward in a half run. As he did another figure stepped from behind the bole of a huge palm. A shaft of bright tropic moon streaming through the rustling palms over-

head clearly outlined the gun in his hand.

Solo jerked his own automatic from his pocket. But he was too slow. Before he could shoot the shadowy figure pulled his own trigger.

There was no loud report, only a muffled snapping whine. The tiny, needlelike projectile the gun fired struck Solo in the shoulder. He felt a sudden spreading numbness that flashed through his body with lightning speed.

He tried to shoot, but his arm was paralyzed. The gun dropped from his nerveless fingers. He tried to shout a warning to Kuryakin. His tongue froze in his mouth. He tried to run. His knees collapsed. He fell forward, hitting the grass.

The paralyzing shot apparently only affected the motor nerves. Solo did not lose consciousness. He heard quick footsteps of the other man returning.

Then a sneering voice said, "I thought you said these U.N.C.L.E. rats were tough!"

"Don't underestimate them, Taro. Watch them every second. They are tricky."

"They won't put anything over me!" the heavy voice of the man addressed as Taro said.

"I'm giving it to you straight, Taro," the other THRUSH man said impatiently. "Don't get over-confident. The only U.N.C.L.E. man you can count out is a dead one!"

"Well, in just a little while that is how you can describe this punk!"

He laughed—a cold, sneering chuckle.

THREE

"GET THE car!" Taro said. "When Horton gets the other one, I'll dump 'em both in the Ala Wai Canal!"

"Be sure you make it look like an accident," the other THRUSH man said. "Things are too shaky right now to risk getting the Honolulu police mixed up in this mess. They're not open to bribery."

"I know my business!" Taro snapped. "When I do a job it's done right."

"Okay, but work fast. That paralyzing serum only holds for a short time. It has to be that way so none of it will show in any autopsies after a victim is found dead."

"Just get me the other punk," Taro said. "Then I promise you it will be over in fifteen minutes."

"Horton is a good man. He'll

have the other one here in a minute."

There was no more conversation between the two. They pulled Napoleon Solo back behind the clump of bamboo. He lay there trying to figure what had happened. He was sure that he had not been followed himself. Also he never detected either of the men he was trailing looking back. Yet he had run directly into a trap. It was hard to explain.

Shortly a car pulled up at the curb behind them.

"Horton?" Taro asked.

"Get a move on. I got the other one!" a heavy voice said from the car.

The two men picked up Napoleon and rushed him into the car. He was propped up in the backseat beside an equally paralyzed Illya Kuryakin.

"Okay, you two take care of them," the THRUSH man said, turning the murder over to Horton and Taro. "I've got to get Lupe and get her on the seaplane out of here. Things worked out great. I'll file a report to THRUSH headquarters on what a great job you boys did"

"Thanks, chief!" Horton said. "I thought for a minute it wasn't going to work. Lupe paraded past that sidewalk restaurant twice before that jerk from U.N.C.L.E. was bright enough to spot her."

"Yeah," Taro put in. "And I thought for a minute the other one wasn't going to have brains enough to follow him. I though I would have to go in and poison his salad!"

"There's no time for talking. Get moving," the THRUSH cell chief said. "And don't waste too much time. That serum wears off fast, but don't worry if they move a little. It will be at least another fifteen minutes before either can use his limbs enough to pose a threat."

"Should we tie 'em up?" Taro asked.

"No, I don't want any rope burns on their wrists. It must look like an accident with absolutely nothing suspicious about their corpses."

"Okay, so long, chief; we'll—"

"Wait!" the cell chief said hurriedly. "I almost forgot something. Frisk them. These U.N.C.L.E. rats carry all sorts of cute gadgets like rings with hidden knockout needles, little balls of tear gas, chewing gum that explodes, mints that turn into fire bombs, and all sorts of trick devices. Unload their pockets."

"We'll have this thing over before they come to enough to use anything like that," Horton said confidently.

"I know," his boss replied, "but THRUSH laboratories are always interested in what new gadgets the competition has come up with."

They quickly turned out both men's pockets. The miniature tape recorder shaped like a package of cigarettes, the pen-communicator, the ring with its hidden needle for

dispensing knockout potions, and the lighter that doubled as a cutting torch, all went into the THRUSH cell chief's pocket.

"Turn on the dome light," Taro said. "Maybe he's got something we didn't get."

"Don't!" the cell chief cautioned. "We can't afford to attract attention. Feel for them."

"Hey! Here's something in Kuryakin's lapel. It's like a lapel button, but there's a tiny bulb on the back!"

A thin hope Napoleon Solo retained crumbled when Taro made that discovery. He had hoped they would overlook that hidden reserve of pressurized tear gas.

He braced himself, desperately trying to force his paralyzed arms up to crush the bulb before Taro could work it out of the lapel. Sweat broke out on his face from the violence of his struggle, but couldn't do more than barely twitch his fingers. He could slightly contract the muscles of his arms, but lacked the power to raise them.

He was sitting upright next to Kuryakin. He suspected that his partner was undergoing an equally desperate attempt to break the paralysis.

Suddenly he switched tactics. He stiffened every workable muscle in his body. He threw everything into a last desperate attempt to move. He did not try to lift his hands any longer. He knew now that this was impossible.

Instead he put every desperate contraction of his sluggish muscles in an attempt to throw his body off balance.

It wasn't too difficult. Kuryakin seemed to realize what he was attempting to do. Illya moved slightly away. With the two bodies not supporting each other so well, Napoleon was able to fall forward.

His head hit against the hand of Taro as the murderous THRUSH agent pulled away the tear gas bulb from Solo's lapel. The blow pushed Taro's fingers down hard against the U.N.C.L.E. protective device. The thin container crushed.

Solo closed his eyes tight as the blinding flood of supercompressed tear gas burst through Taro's fingers. The three THRUSH men jumped back, but it was too late. They fell, choking and crying, too blinded to see.

Both Solo and Illya closed their eyes tightly in preparation for the rush of irritating gases, but even so the highly penetrable material set their eyes streaming with blinding tears.

Solo hunched over, his chin hanging over the back of the front seat. Tears streamed down his face. His body racked with choking coughs.

But despite his painful predicament, his mind was still working sharply. He tried to raise his arms again. He still could do no more then barely move them. He tried to speak to Kuryakin, but his

tongue would not move. He shifted his feet and got the slightest movement.

It was true that the effects of the THRUSH numbing injection was wearing off, but he was certain now it would come too late. Even though the soft trade winds dispersed the tear gas, the effect once it entered the eyes would last for about fifteen minutes.

That meant that the THRUSH men would regain their faculties before he and Illya could hope to beat off the paralysis.

There was always a hope that somone would pass, see them and call the police. However, he knew it was a slim one. This section of the park was carefully chosen by the THRUSH men because it was deserted at night.

It was only a short distance to Kalakaua, the Broadway of Waikiki, but for all the good it did them, the street might have been a mile away.

In the background he could hear the THRUSH men coughing and retching. He knew that he had to find some way to call attention to their plight before the nauseating tear gas wore off. The tool for that lay just two feet from his head, but he couldn't move two inches.

He tensed, waiting for a spasm of coughing to pass and then threw his full will into a desperate effort to move.

When this supreme trial failed, he relaxed. His chin fell down over the back curve of the front seat. For a while he huddled there, coughing, eyes streaming and fighting the struggle of his stomach to throw up.

At the same time time, he tried to estimate the passing time. It was impossible. Time dragged so slowly for the desperate man that each ticking second moved like an hour.

He waited until he estimated another five minutes had passed. He tensed. His body shivered with his intense struggle to raise his hand. His teeth gritted. Sweat poured from his face. Slowly his hands moved two inches. His feet shifted slightly.

He relaxed, taking fresh courage from the movement. The paralysis was wearing off, but so slowly he doubted it would come fast enough to save them. He strained again, striving with all his strength to force his body. Already he was coughing less, proving that the tear gas was wearing off faster than the paralysis serum.

He tried to estimate the passage of time by the old photographer's system of counting seconds by saying, "One-thousand-and-one, one-thousand-and-two—"

He waited then for another five minutes before throwing all his depleted strength into one more final attempt to move. He knew this was his last chance.

This time he braced his legs, trying to heave his body up. It moved slightly. He managed to get his

dragging arms over the back of the front seat. He pulled with his arms and pushed hard with his legs.

But his body shook. It inched up slightly, but his trembling legs lacked the force to push him up. He hung there, taking all his strength to maintain his balance. There was none left to push himself up any higher.

Grimly he hung on to the slight gain he had made. Even though he knew he had lost, he refused to let himself fall back. The relentless determination that had carried him through desperate situations before refused to quit even when he knew it was useless to struggle any longer.

Then he felt a weight against his shoulder. He realized it was Illya Kuryakin. His partner seemed to realize what he was doing. He tried to speak to him, but his racking coughs from the special U.N.C.L.E. gas choked his voice.

But he didn't need to speak. Kuryakin understood what he was attempting. He needed no instructions.

Weakly pushing himself partly up, Illya got his shoulder under Solo's armpit. For a breathless moment the two men remained there, gathering strength for the final push that could mean the difference between life and death.

For a brief moment they hesitated. Then Solo's muscles tensed again. Illya felt it and shoved with his feet, putting all his slowly returning strength into a push to help Napoleon.

Solo's legs shook under the strain of heaving his body up. For one nearly fatal moment he thought he was going to fall, but with agonizing slowness he kept moving with Kuryakin's help.

But his rising body reached the overbalance point and he fell forward over the back of the front seat. His head hit the steering wheel with a crack that momentarily dazed him.

Then gasping, choking, he forced his head into a slight shift to the left. It touched the horn button. He pressed his head down harder.

The blast of the horn cut through the soft tropic night, loud, insistent, never stopping!

The effort, plus the hard blow he took on the head when he fell forward in his desperate attempt to hit the horn, was too much for him. His senses reeled. He lost consciousness, but the weight of his body kept the horns screeching out its wild appeal for help.

When he regained consciousness he was in an ambulance. All his frantic appeals that he was not injured, only deathly tired, had no affect on the attendants. They refused to release him.

At the hospital the doctors were equally adamant. He had to call New York and get Waverly to call the surgeon general of the U.S. Public Health Service before the stubborn doctor would release his

prerogative of deciding when a patient was well or not.

Even then the doctor, a short little man with bristly hair and the manner of an indignant bulldog, was furious.

Following their release from the hospital, Illya and Napoleon held a hasty conference at their Waikiki hotel.

The three THRUSH men were in the Honolulu jail, but neither would talk. On their own the two men from U.N.C.L.E. might have injected the prisoners with truth serum, but since they were in the hands of the civilian police, this was impossible. The U.S. constitutional guarantee against self-incrimination held true even when the knowledge hidden could mean the destruction of half a dozen of the world's governments.

Lupe de Rosa had vanished. All attempts to find her in Honolulu were fruitless. Late on the second day Illya picked up her trail, but it proved too late. He traced her to Hilo on the "Big Island" and from there she took a chartered sea plane for Maui, but never arrived.

Back checking they discovered the seaplane landed in Honlulu instead. A general alarm was put out for the pilot. Honolulu and the entire island of Oahu were combed for both him and the girl. Absolutely no trace of either were found.

Solo checked back on the pilot's record, utilizing Army service records, FBI facilities and the international records of Interpol and U.N.C.L.E.

"This man is clean," he said in a discouraged voice when he and Illya held their next conference. "There is absolutely no evidence to connect him with THRUSH or any other criminal organization. He was a good family man, an ardent supporter of the church and active in civic affairs."

"Then that means he is probably dead," Illya said. "Lupe or some other THRUSH agent hired the plane. After it flew her to a secret destination, the pilot returned here and was silenced."

"But where did she go?" Napoleon asked irritably. "She didn't leave by plane, by boat or by outrigger!"

"Maybe she swam!" Illya said.

Napoleon gave him a sour look. "It may be closer to the truth than you realized."

He turned to the telephone on the table beside the sitting room couch. He dialed jerkily and sat staring moodily out across the vista of Waikiki visible through the hotel window.

"Colonel Davis, please," he said into the phone when his call was completed. "Colonel? Napoleon Solo here. Did the okay come from Washington to cooperate with Mr. Kuryakin and me? Good! There is something most important. The Islands defense system has means of checking on any submarine penetration of this area?"

When Colonel Davis replied in the affirmative, Napoleon asked, "Would your defense patrols intercept any such undersea craft?"

"No," the army defense chief said. "Not unless it penetrated within the three mile territorial limits of Hawaii. We would mark its position and aerial patrols and anti-submarine units of the Navy would keep close watch over it just in case it might be a defense threat."

"Was one reported out around Maui yesterday?"

"There was," the colonel said.

"I see," Napoleon said. "Was the sea calm enough that a light seaplane might have landed on the water and made contact with this submarine?"

"Oh, entirely possible," the defense chief said. "Our patrols observed no such action, but when they arrived the submarine was submerged and departing."

"Do you have any indication of the sub's identity?"

"No," the colonel said. "These things happen all the time, both here, along the U.S. Pacific Coast and on the Atlantic. Foreign countries do it to test our defenses. We do the same thing in Asia and Europe. That is not unusual. However, if someone from Hawaii joined the sub, then that is not usual. We would be very much interested in a report of that to our counter-intelligence."

"As soon as I have anything definite, colonel," Napoleon sad, "I'll

certainly make a full report. Thanks for your help."

He hung up and turned to Illya. "Well, wise guy, you are right for once. She swam off—in a tin fish!"

"To join the *Waterloo,* more than likely," Illya said. "Am I permitted to venture a small guess?"

"Don't waste time telling me she is probably going to the *Waterloo* to help solve the problem of why storm generation is not as successful in the Pacific as it was in the Atlantic," Napoleon said. "I'm smart too."

"While you're being so smart," Illya said with a sour grin, "go on and tell me how you intend to keep this *Waterloo* ship from being the Waterloo of us both?"

"I intend to depend on your brilliance," Napoleon said with a grin of his own. "You are the difference, you know. And that is an order directly from Waverly himself!"

"I wish I could," Illya said.

"Never have I felt so useless on any case. We are getting absolutely nowhere, Napoleon."

"Don't I know it!" Solo said with a worried frown creasing his forehead. "I was talking to Waverly just a half hour ago. He reports there is excitement all through the THRUSH organization. Harmon reports it from Europe. April Dancer sent a similar report from South America. Mark Slate had the same story from Southeast Asia. Waverly believes THRUSH has definite hope that the girl will solve the problem. They believe it so strongly that they have alerted their cells worldwide to be ready to step in when these monstrous storms spread their destruction!"

"I don't know what we are doing wasting more time here," Illya said. "We've got to find a new lead. I think—"

He broke off when the phone rang. Napoleon, who was nearest, picked up the instrument. Illya, tensely watching his partner's face, saw Napoleon start.

"What is it?" Illya asked eagerly.

"A typhoon has been spotted outside the usual belt!" Solo said hurriedly. Then into the phone he said, "How is the storm reacting?"

He listened for a few seconds and said, "We certainly would! We'll be there as soon as a taxi can get us there!"

He jammed down the phone. "The storm acts as though it's crippled!" he said to Illya. "It builds up fury and then seems to lose its punch and then builds up again. It is sort of pulsing!"

"This could be it!" Illya said, his face flushing with excitement. "What are we going to do?"

"We are going to ride one of the typhoon-tracker planes out and see for ourselves!"

"Typhoon-trackers? Those are the boys who deliberately fly into these cyclones to measure wind velocity and direction, isn't it?"

"That's right," Napoleon said. "We're going to go straight into that storm and we're not coming out without its secrets!"

ACT VIII

INTO THE STORM!

AN HOUR LATER Solo and Kuryakin were in a weather reconnaissance plane of the U.S. Air Force, heading into the deep Pacific out of Honolulu.

Another weather reconnaissance plane was already in the area which was east of Tarawa in the Gilbert Islands. The two men listened to the reports coming back.

"It is a small storm," the report said. "It covers about two hundred and fifty miles in radius. We managed to penetrate into the eye. It covers an area of about fifteen miles. There is a wall of clouds circling about the eye which holds the worst turbulence I have ever en-

countered. I am estimating the wind speed at close to two hundred knots—and that is *some* wind. The hail, rain and lightning is awful. There are times when I didn't think we would make it. Under no circumstances do I recommend you to try a penetration yourself."

The pilot called Napoleon Solo on the intercom.

"We are under your orders," he said. "We were told to do as you wished. Shall we try to penetrate the storm or not?"

Napoleon hesitated.

"What do you recommend?" he asked.

"It is getting close to night," he said. "I don't know what we could find out inside the eye that the other weather plane didn't get."

"Can you get him on the radio?" Solo asked. "Ask if he saw any indication of a ship in the eye."

"No," the answer came back across the intervening miles. "The ocean inside the eye is lashed to an awful fury. A fish would get seasick in that wild water. I don't see how any ship could keep afloat if trapped in there."

Illya Kuryakin nodded.

"You remember, Napoleon," he said. "When we were in the eye of that Atlantic hurricane, the trapped sea water inside the eye was boiling while the air above was perfectly still."

"What about on the fringes outside the circular area of the storm itself?" Solo asked. "Can you get any radar return that shows a ship or submarine might be anywhere along the fringes?"

"No," the reply came back, "but the only reading we can get is the side we are on. There could be a ship on the other side, but our radar will not penetrate the entire storm area. We get a bounce-back off the clouds, you know."

"Okay," Napoleon said, making a fast decision. "The plane out there now must come back. Its fuel is getting low. I think we should go on, even though it is getting dark. We won't try to penetrate the storm itself. But I want to circle as much of the total storm area as possible. I'm sure the *Waterloo* is somewhere in the area."

"And if it isn't?" Illya asked.

"Then this is a real storm and not one of THRUSH's hellish experiments," Napoleon said grimly. "That will mean returning to Hawaii and starting all over again."

"There isn't time to start again," Illya said. "Time is running out on us, Napoleon."

"I know it," Solo said grimly. "Those world-wide reports of THRUSH activity shows they expect the climax to come very soon. It makes me shudder, Illya, when I think of the millions of lives that may be lost."

"It makes me shudder even more," Illya said soberly, "when I think how little we have to go on to save those lives."

"All we can do is keep trying—trying right up to the end."

The plane droned on across the wide Pacific. The sun dropped lower. Clouds started to thicken on the horizon. The slanting light of the dropping sun set them ablaze with fiery color.

The turbulence of the air increased as they started to circle the fringes of the storm.

The plane flew on, its weather radar beam scanning storm and sea. An hour passed. It was twilight, with only a few minutes of visibility left. The radar was still seeking some sign of the *Waterloo*.

It had grown too dark to see anything on the water by human eyesight. Napoleon and Illya left their scanners' positions and went forward to watch the radar screen over the operator's shoulder.

They watched the blips come and go on the greenly glowing screen. Once they thought they saw something, but it proved to be a whale. Another time the radar scope picked up an object, but they were never able to identify it.

Then the operator pointed out a new blip echoing from the water.

"Probably that whale again," he said.

"He's in for a tough swim if he doesn't get away from that storm," Illya said, recalling the wild froth whipped up inside the eye.

"No," the operator said. "Most of the sea agitation is along the surface. If you drop in a submarine, say, a hundred or so feet below the water, you would never know there was a storm overhead."

Napoleon and Solo looked at each other. "Then that sub which picked up the girl could have gone under the storm to make the rendezvous with the *Waterloo*," Illya said.

"I think this is it," Solo said grimly.

Napoleon Solo nodded. He called the pilot on the intercom. "I'd like to go down as low as possible and investigate this whale."

"It's going to be rougher down there," the pilot warned. "Hold on tight."

The huge four-motored weather plane circled, losing altitude. True to the pilot's prediction, it became increasingly rough as the plane descended.

"What is the 'whale' doing?" Illya asked. To him the glowing radar screen was a mystery.

"I've lost him," the operator said. "You see, radar beams reflect off clouds and rain masses. "We can't see anything behind them."

"I thought the Air Force uses radar to bomb through clouds," Solo said.

"Yes, but we're weather observers," the operator replied. "If we used beams that would go right through clouds like X-ray, it would do us no good. We are trying to find out about clouds and their shapes."

"I see," Solo said and he sounded discouraged. "Do you—"

"Wait! I've got something! It just came out of that rain squall mass here on the top of the scope. It's—yes, it's a boat of some kind. Just a minute. I can give you its length. It's about sixty-five feet long and —Hey, maybe that isn't a whale after all. It's making contact with the boat!"

Solo's heart leaped. "It is the sub that picked up Rosa," he said to Illya. "This is it, my friend!"

"What are we going to do? I'm for calling Waverly and getting the U.S. Navy submarines to sink both the *Waterloo* and the sub."

"And get them in international difficulties?" Solo asked. "We have no positive proof that the *Waterloo* is engaged in directing storms. All we have are suspicions. We could never get any official action on the basis of what we have."

"Then it is up to us to take unofficial action," Kuryakin said. "I don't think it would be any breach of international maritime law to go down for a close look at the ship. We could claim we thought it might be in danger from the storm."

"That sounds good to me," Napoleon said. "Solo to pilot, over! Can we go down for a close look at those ships?"

"Roger," the pilot said. "Hold on tight. It is going to be some roller coaster ride."

He put the big plane in a steep bank and started to descend. As they dropped, the two men from U.N.C.L.E. saw details of the sea. The waves were piling up. Their whitecaps were snatched away by the hard wind.

"It must be pretty important for those two vessels to meet to risk docking with each other in this wind," the pilot said.

"I imagine it is," Illya replied.

Suddenly the wind faltered, came back with a hard gust and then almost died.

"That has been going on since the blame thing was sighted," the ship's weather observer said to Solo. "It is what makes this storm so unusual. It seems to have trouble keeping going."

"Good!" Napoleon said crisply. "It will give us a break to get a close look at that rendezvous."

The plane came down only a couple of hundred feet above the water. Despite the fall of the wind the waves were still high and angry.

They faced a sudden rain squall. The plane plunged into it. Rain drummed on the windows. A sudden gust of wind caused the airplane to lurch. Then the wind died to amost nothing. They came out of the rain with the mysterious ship dead ahead. There was no sign of the submarine in the gloom, but the radar scope showed it slightly submerged and departing.

Napoleon was at the scanner's window, trying to focus a pair of binoculars he borrowed from the

pilot. The plane was bouncing so badly he could not get a clear enough view in the gloom to pick out the vessel's name on the bow.

Suddenly the plane gave a savage lurch that almost tore loose Solo's grip. In spite of himself his shoulder hit the side of the plane with a hard jolt.

The pilot suddenly applied full power. The straining plane shuddered as it struggled for altitude. A wing dipped dangerously. For one startled moment Napoleon Solo thought they were falling into a side slip. But slowly the pilot brought his craft under control again.

"Hang on!" he called grimly over the intercom. "They're shooting at us!"

Then as the plane circled, struggling for altitude, Napoleon saw an explosion just off their right wing. It was a savage burst of fire and smoke, reminding him of a 75mm shell burst.

The plane shuddered again. Napoleon did not have to wait for the pilot's report to know they were hit. For a moment they lost altitude, but then began to climb with agonizing slowness.

Another shell ripped through the fuselage. It exploded in the radio compartment. Illya and Napoleon rushed forward. The radio operator was dead. The radio equipment was a shambles. Even the plane's intercom was out.

Napoleon stepped through into the pilot's cockpit. He was staggered by what he saw. Another shell had ripped away part of the windshield. Rain and wind was slashing through the broken hole. The co-pilot was slumped over his controls, unconscious. Blood was streaming down the pilot's face.

He turned his agonized eyes on Solo.

"I c-an't keep her up! Help me!"

With Illya's help, Napoleon pulled the unconscious co-pilot out of the way and slipped into the seat himself. Acting on the choked instructions of the man in the other seat, Solo helped him fight to keep the plane under control.

"Right rudder! R-right rudder!" the pilot cried.

Solo jammed the right rudder control down with all his strength. The plane was lurching with the renewed fury of the wind. The rain was increasing in violence. An occasional ball of hail banged like a cannon ball on the skin of the plane.

"The typhoon is overtaking us!" the ship's weather observer, Major Frank Patterson, came forward to tell them.

"T-here's not a chance with the ship crippled like this!" the injured pilot gasped.

"We can't ditch in the ocean!" the weather observer said quickly. "Those waves will pile up as much as a hundred feet high before the storm subsides. No human being could live in such a sea, no matter what kind of a life vest he wore!"

"We'll never keep aloft," the pilot said, gritting his teeth against the pain from his cut head. "One engine is out now. Another is running rough. I don't expect it to hold out much longer. We have no directional aids. I don't know where in hell we are. Without a radio we haven't any chance of getting back to Hawaii."

"Look," the observer said, desperation in his voice. "This section of the Pacific is dotted with atolls. Can't we find one to crash land on?"

"Our navigator is dead," the pilot said wearily. "I don't know where we are. I don't know where any islands are."

One of the enlisted scanners stuck his head in the cockpit.

"Major!" he said, shouting to making himself heard above the howl of the wind ripping through the broken section of the windshield. "I checked the radio equipment like you told me. There isn't a chance of patching it up enough to get any reception."

"What do we do?" the major said.

"Pray, if you still know how," the pilot said.

His head drooped with weariness. Rain splashing through the cracked plexiglass, ran down his face. The plane side-slipped dangerously as his feet slipped on the foot controls. He caught himself in time.

Slowly through the combined supreme efforts of himself and Napoleon Solo, they got the plane flying half way level again.

All of them knew the pilot couldn't hold out much longer. He had already done more than any person should be called upon to do.

It would only be a matter of a short time before he would collapse completely.

Illya Kuryakin offered to take his place.

"You can sit between us and tell us what to do."

The pilot shook his head. "What good will it do? I think I can hold out longer than the plane will."

"Do you think we could make it to some atoll island if we could get a fix on our position?" Napoleon asked. They could converse a little better since Major Patterson rigged up a canvas barrier that partially cut out the driving rain slamming into the cockpit.

"Maybe," the pilot said. "That's all I can say—maybe. In this kind of a storm, nothing is certain. We're being carried farther into it. We don't have sufficient power left in our crippled engines to fight our way out!"

Napoleon turned and shouted back over his shoulder to Kuryakin, "Illya! Can you raise New York on the pen-communicator?"

"I don't even know if the thing works," Kuryakin said. "I haven't tried it since we got it back from the police when they searched Taro. But I'll try."

He pulled out the tiny world-wide communication set. A twist of the cap extended the six inch aerial. He quickly spoke his identifying call letters and added, "Kuryakin calling Mr. Waverly. Emergency! Over!"

He repeated the call several times. Then he paused. Vicious bolts of lightning were ripping through the black boiling clouds. He waited until the worse of the display was over. Solo looked back at him, anxiously as Illya tried again.

"Kuryakin calling Mr. Waverly! This is an emergency! Over!"

"—ryakin. This is Wav—"

That is all they got. Illya looked at Napoleon.

"Repeat!—Keep—repeatin—"

"He means keep repeating your message over and over," Solo said quickly. "The atmospherics are so bad it keeps killing part of the reception. But if you keep repeating it, they'll be able to assemble a complete message from the fragments!"

"Here goes!" Illya said. "I hope it does some good!"

The tone of his voice implied that he didn't have much hope.

ACT IX

THE CRASH

SLOWLY, DESPERATELY, *Illya* Kuryakin kept repeating a brief message. It took about five minutes before Waverly's broken transmission indicated that the U.N.C.L.E. chief understood their situation. He told them to keep transmitting while the great U.N.C.L.E. locator transmitters located in strategic places around the world tried to zero in on the pen-communicafor transmission and get a fix on their position.

Three minutes later Waverly reported: "We will have you in forty-five minutes."

"We must land! We must land! We must land!" Illya kept repeating the message for a full minute. "Give us the coordinates for the nearest atoll! Give us—"

This interchange went on for what seemed forever to the anxious men in the plane. Finally there was a slight break in the rain static. They heard Waverly so clearly he

seemed to be in the cockpit with them.

"The Alofa Atoll, a group off the beaten track but governed out of the British Gilbert Islands, is about twenty-five miles from your present location, as nearly as we can determine. The storm is interferring with our reception on the locator beams as well as on the radio. If you take a heading of—"

"All our directional equipment is out, sir," Illya interrupted to say. "We don't even have a working pocket compass. All we know is that we are circling."

There was a silence on the radio. "I think we've lost them," Illya said. "And only twenty-five miles away! It might as well be twenty-five million if we don't know which way to head!"

Then the pen-communicator speaker boomed out again. "Waverly here. Can you read me?"

"You are coming in loud and clear, sir," Illya said.

"I can barely hear you," Waverly said. "I will talk fast before my own transmission fails. Our directional beams can no longer pinpoint you exactly. It is impossible for us to give you directions."

"Well, that's it!" the pilot said wearily.

"But there is a bare possibility," Waverly went on. "We have direct lines open to New York Weather Central and Weather Central in Hawaii. Weather planes with long range radar were dispatched over two hours ago. They have the storm in their scopes, but cannot pick you up. In any event, they know the speed and location of the storm exactly. It has stopped pulsing and is picking up fury. It is moving directly toward Alofa Atoll. Are you reading me?"

"Clearly, sir," Illya said quickly.

"Then here is what the aviation and weather experts here suggest," Waverly said. "They say it is your only chance."

"We'll take it!" Illya said.

Rain from the cracked window splattered his face and dripped to the flight deck.

"You must get into the eye of the storm. In your crippled condition you can't stay aloft in this violence. All prediction is for it to get worse. Get into the eye. Then, if you can keep circling for the next forty-five minutes, the typhoon will move directly over Alofa. After that you can crash land the best you can. Do you read me?"

"Yes, sir," Illya said.

"It's a desperate chance," Waverly said. "But it is all you have. Good luck. We'll all be pulling for you here!"

The next hour was the longest either of the men from U.N.C.L.E. had ever experienced. The drawn out terror of fighting the awful battering of the storm was the worst moments of their lives. They struggled to the point of total exhaustion to keep the plane flying a halfway level course. Those able to

take the controls spelled each other until worked into exhaustion themselves.

The pitching of the plane was so bad all except Kuryakin were airsick. The rain and hail slammed the unfortunate plane. Once a terrific gust of wind seemed to whirl them in a circle. The plane sideslipped, at one point falling so far the crippled engines almost failed to bring her back up. Once the nose went down and the tail acted as if it wanted to take the lead. For a breathless moment the plane was completely out of control.

Kuryakin and Solo were at the controls. The injured pilot was thrown from his perch between them, slamming heavily against the instrument panel.

Both men from U.N.C.L.E. hung on to the wheel, fighting to bring the plane's nose back up. Two of the crewmen pulled the pilot up, but a sudden shift of the wind piled them all on top of Solo. He lost his grip on the wheel. The savage fury of the wind was too much for one man to hold.

Kuryakin struggled, but the plane's nose went down again.

The plane picked up speed, plunging down at a forty-five degree angle.

"Some one help me!" Napoleon Solo gasped.

One of the crewmen sprang to his aid. Solo got his hands back on the other wheel. One of the other crewmen gave him a hand. The other tried to get the pilot back on his feet.

"Quick!" Solo gasped. "Ask him what we do now! We can't seem to bring it out of the dive!"

"He's out completely!" the sergeant bent over the pilot cried.

"Then what in Hades do we do?" Napoleon grated. "Doesn't anybody know how to fly this confounded thing?"

"Major Patterson! Can you take over these controls for me?" Illya said hurriedly. "I'll see if I can raise New York on the communicator again. Maybe Mr. Waverly can get us a pilot who can give us directions!"

"You had better get him in the next minute or two," Solo said. "The way we're going down, it won't be long! I can't see the ground, but it must be down there somewhere. The ocean, I mean."

Major Patterson slipped into the pilot's seat as Illya relinquished his grip on the wheel. He started to step back. As he did the plane gave a mighty lurch. The nose was thrown up until the plane almost stood on its tail.

Solo and Patterson, who had been pulling back on the controls with all their strength in an impossible attempt to bring the nose up, now frantically reversed procedures to try and bring it down again.

Illya's grip on the back of the pilot's seat was torn loose. He was thrown back, slamming against the

back of the cockpit compartment with a jarring force that momentarily stunned him. He hit the flight deck and his instinct for survival caused him to try and fight his way back on his feet again.

He got to his knees when another sickening turn of the plane threw him heavily against the back of the co-pilot's seat. He staggered up, hanging on to the back of the seat occupied by Solo.

He was swaying so badly he did not immediately realize that the terrible wind had ceased.

He looked around in surprise. The slashing rain was gone. There were stars visible overhead. He blinked, still too dazed to comprehend the sudden stillness of the air about them.

Then Solo's voice cut through his hazy brain: "We're in the eye! Don't tell me we did that!"

"Not us," Patterson said from the pilot's seat. "It was the plane! It must have been, for I surely didn't know what I was doing!"

"I guess these planes are like the cavalry horses. The old soldiers used to tell recruits just to let the horses alone and they would get them through the drill. Horses had more sense than soldiers in those days!"

"We're still going down," Napoleon said, suddenly sobering after the first burst of jubilation at getting out of the wild winds of the spinning typhoon.

The plane was losing altitude as its overtaxed engines started cutting out momentarily, but not as badly as before.

"Can you see the atoll?" Patterson asked anxiously.

"I can't see a thing," Napoleon said. "Do you think the eye has already passed the island?"

Below it was dark, but they could easily make out the frothing sea. It looked white for the trapped waters were churned into a mad frenzy by the circling wall of terrific winds.

Nobody spoke for a moment. Each knew it was death for the plane to drop in those anguished waters.

"How is the pilot?" Solo asked. "Is there any way of bringing him to long enough to give us some instructions?"

Patterson crouched over the pilot's body looked up. He shivered.

"No, sir!" he said in a thick voice. "He's dead!"

"And the flight engineer is dead too," Solo said in a stricken voice.

Illya pulled himself together and reached for the pen-communicator. He shakily extended the aerial. All he got was a thick crackle of static from the boiling ring of clouds circling about the typhoon eye with speeds above one hundred and seventy-five knots.

Solo glanced back over his shoulder. "Illya! Can't you raise New York?"

"No," Kuryakin said, shoving the communicator back in his pocket.

"Well, that's it," Solo said grimly. "That looks like the atoll ahead. It is just emerging from the storm into the eye."

"Yes! That's it!" Patterson cried.

"But how do we land?" Solo said. "I wouldn't know what to do if there was a ten thousand foot runway. What can I do on a coral strip covered with coconut palms, and most of them blown down by the wind?"

They were still circling, trying to stay within the forty miles radius of the typhoon eye. But at the same time they were gradually losing altitude.

It was only a matter of minutes before they had to come down somewhere. Each second the mad, vicious ocean was getting closer and closer to the belly of the doomed plane.

"What do we do?" Patterson said, his voice hoarse.

"Let's try to figure out something!" Solo replied. "What do you do when you land? You go down, level off, touch the wheels and roll. Going down is no problem. We're doing that any way."

"We can't roll," Patterson said. "So we can't use that to eat up our landing speed."

"How about pulling back on the stick just before we strike? That should bring the nose up and then the tail can drag and slow us down before the nose drops?" Illya suggested. "It seems to me that is the big problem. We have to get our speed down before we take the big bump."

"We would break the tail off," Patterson objected.

"Well, we'll break our own tails off if we don't!" the fiery little man from U.N.C.L.E. retorted.

Patterson had no answer to that one.

"Let's try it," Solo said, the deep lines of his face mirrored his bone weariness. The terrific struggle to hang on to the plane's controls had brought him close to the point of collapse.

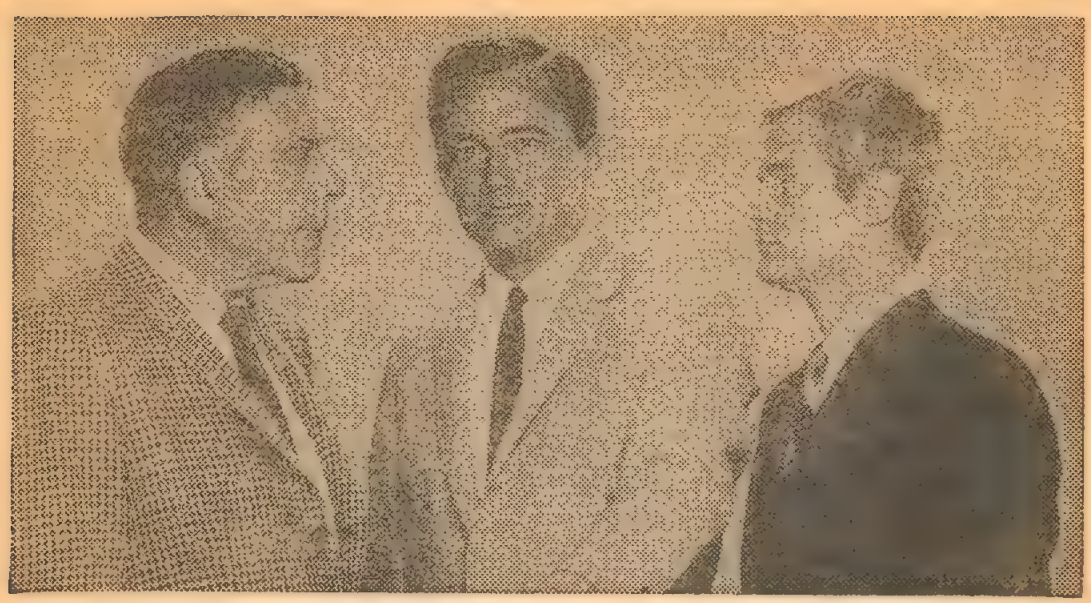
"Well, you never know what you can do until you try it," Patterson said. His weary voice held little confidence.

TWO

THEY CIRCLED one more time and then headed directly in toward the storm-battled island. The atoll was a circular stand of coral built on the rim of an extinct undersea volcano to make a thin rim of tiny islands circling a small lagoon. The water in the lagoon, partially protected by the encircling reef, was not lashed to the terrible fury of the open sea.

They came in less than one hundred twenty-five feet above the sea. The boiling foam started striking the bottom of the plane as they descended lower.

They came over the south strip of islands at fifty feet. It was uninhabited and completely treeless. In



the darkness Solo got just a glimpse of coral sand reflecting the starlight coming down through the open eye above them.

The larger island was looming up fast across the lagoon.

"Now!" Solo cried.

Both he and Patterson pulled back on the wheel, desperately trying to lift the nose of the plane. All the others braced themselves for the coming crash. Illya threw himself on the flight deck, pressing his back and the back of his head against the rear of the pilot's seat. He shoved his legs hard against the fuselage to brace himself.

The tail of the plane struck the lagoon. The crashing surf splashed higher than the plane. They were blinded by the foaming water striking the windshield.

The tail dragged on the coral, sending a terrible vibration through the dying airplane. The two men in the pilot and co-pilot's seat struggled to hold back on the stick, still fighting to keep the planes' nose up.

It was losing speed fast. One wing tip struck the huge bole of a coconut tree. They spun around. The other wing dug into the sand. The plane heaved up as if trying to fly again. It settled and the broken trunk of a palm, ripped by the typhoon, rammed through the fuselage.

Its splintered end sliced through Patterson's body. It rammed past Napoleon Solo and smashed into the instrument panel.

The plane hung there, rocking, each metal joint creaking in a dying agony.

Outside there was a glaring flash of light and fire burst through a tearing hole in the wing as one of the wing gas tanks exploded.

"We've got to get out!" Solo gasped. "Illya! Are you okay?"

"Yes," Kuryakin said shakily. "We've got one dead man, but the rest seem to be okay."

"I'm trapped," Solo said. "This broken palm trunk has me wedged in. Can you—"

Illya grabbed the palm trunk and heaved as Solo pushed with all his strength. It would not budge. Outside on the wing the flaming gas fire was eating closer to the cockpit.

Illya straightened up. "We're not doing any good. Just a minute. I'll get some help. I—"

"Hey!" one of the airmen cried from the back of the plane. "Somebody's coming! There's people on the island!"

"I'll get help!" Illya repeated to Solo. "I'll be right back."

Kuryakin turned and ran to the waist door of the plane. In the flickering light of the fire he could see several people running through the downed palms toward the wreck. One of the latter was a woman.

"Hurry!" Illya shouted to them. "We've got some men trapped in here!"

The first to clamber into the plane was a giant Polynesian man wearing only a native lava-lave loin cloth. Illya grabbed his arm.

"This way!" he gasped. "There's a man trapped in the cockpit. We must get him out now, before the flames—"

The big Polynesian grunted. He grabbed the smaller man about the waist and threw him from the plane. Illya hit in the wet coral sand, sprawling flat and just missing the bole of an uprooted palm.

He jerked himself up. "Hey!" he shouted. "I—"

"Stop! Stop, Mr. Solo!"

The cold feminine voice caused Illya to jerk around. He stared open-mouthed into the deadly hole of a .38 automatic held in the hand of Lupe de Rosa.

"Grab him!" she ordered.

A native in European dress sprang forward to grab Illya's arms. He tried to struggle, but in his weakened condition they handled him easily.

"Napoleon! Napoleon!" he shouted. "We're in the hands of THRUSH! We crashed on a THRUSH controlled island!"

The European smashed him in the face. Illya sagged. They let him drop. He fell face down in the sand.

Inside the cockpit, Napoleon heard Illya's warning cry. He knew it was impossible to extricate himself in time. The tree trunk was pressed so tightly across his chest that he couldn't even get to his gun in its shoulder holster.

He reached out and rubbed his hand over the bloody body of the dead man in the pilot's seat. He streaked the blood across his own temple and sagged his head against the trunk. He closed his eyes.

The big Polynesian came into the cockpit. He looked at the

smashed body of the pilot and grunted. He looked at Solo and reached for Napoleon's wrist. He felt the pulse and grunted again.

He wrapped his huge arms about the entrapping tree trunk and heaved. The bole shivered and moved just a fraction of an inch. The giant relaxed, took a deep breath and grasped the tree trunk again.

Outside the blazing fire was moving rapidly up the plane's wing. Solo could feel the heat, scorching against his head.

But as the big Polynesian grasped the log for a final heave to free Solo, a voice with a Middle-Eastern accent said from behind them:

"Leave him! It's not worth the trouble."

"Him still alive!" the Polynesian said.

"He won't be long!" the newcomer said and laughed. "Let the fire take care of him."

The Polynesian straightened up. "You big boss," he said.

"I sure as hell am and don't you ever forget it. Come on. Let him burn!"

ACT X

THE THRUSH OUTPOST

WHEN ILLYA KURYAKIN regained consciousness, he found himself strapped in a chair inside a small room jammed with electronic gear. The first thing he saw when he opened his eyes was the angry face of Lupe de Rosa. The first thing he heard was her bitter voice: "Kill him! He has caused me nothing but trouble!"

"That's what I like in my girl friends," Illya mumbled. "Quiet, shy, lovable—"

She hit him hard across the mouth. A trickle of blood ran down from a cut where her blow drove his lip against his teeth.

She whirled on a tall man with a middle-Eastern accent.

"Where is the other one?" she snapped.

"Miss de Rosa!" he said in a harsh voice. "You may be the chief scientist for this project, but I am in charge of this station! I am responsible to THRUSH headquarters for its security. Not you. I will stay out of your technical business. You will stay out of my security affairs!"

"If you had done your work properly here, it would not have been necessary for me to come!" she snapped. "These storms lost energy because this station did not operate correctly. We must have three points of electronic focus to build up these typhoons to the point where their own energy will carry them forward. Your station here did not reach full energy capacity!"

"That was not my fault," he said defensively. "The equipment you sent was defective."

"It was no such thing!" she

snapped. "I personally checked it out before it left South America. The trouble was in sabotage—*here*! Now what about your highly vaunted security!"

The tall field chief grabbed Lupe's shoulder. "If you try to send out a report like that, I'll—"

Lupe's hand flashed down to her handbag. She didn't bother to draw the gun cached there. She fired through the leather. The field chief clutched his stomach. Blood pumped between his agonized fingers. He pitched forward on his face.

The girl from THRUSH whirled to face the others, drawing the gun from her bag. The group, three European and the big Polynesian, stared silently at her.

"Get the THRUSH-Pacific on the coder!" she snapped. "It sends through the water. The storm atmospherics will not interfere."

One of the Europeans came to remove a silver key from the body of the dead man. He moved back, keeping a wary eye on the gun in Lupe's hand.

He inserted the key in an electronic box. The key completed a complicated circuit inside.

A voice from the box said, "Four-oh-one. The check shows the mixer-coder in operation. We cannot be intercepted. You may speak."

"This is THRUSH outpost three," Lupe said, going over to the mike, but keeping her gun on the men. "I had to liquidate the field chief here. Inform the rest of my status, please."

"The lady known to you as Lupe de Rosa is a member of the Supreme THRUSH scientific board. Her orders take precedence over all other THRUSH agents below Division One level. Is this understood?"

Each of the men, including the Polynesian, were required to give his identification number into the black box and their understanding.

"Can you report now?" the voice asked Lupe.

"You have my report to the time I contacted the *Waterloo*. I was unable to go aboard because of the high seas. However, the data I received from the ship permitted me to deduce the trouble. It came from a weak signal generated by one of the focalpoints we use to start the gravitational spin to create the revolving storm. I came here in the submarine after ordering the guidance crew on the *Waterloo* to move the storm's eye over the atoll here."

"Excellent!" the THRUSH voice said. "What did you learn?"

"The trouble is sabotage! Someone in this group deliberately grounded the central machine. It could not put out full power. The saboteur is surely still among us!"

"There are electronic interrogation machines in the submarine," the THRUSH voice said. "Did it remain?"

"Yes, it is submerged in the la-

goon to keep it from being harmed when the eye passes," Lupe said.

"Call the sub commander and have one of the machines brought up to the control room," the THRUSH voice said. "Ferret out the traitor as quickly as possible—and take care of him! I'd like a report as soon as possible on his identity."

"I will do so," Lupe said crisply. "I also have either Solo or Kuryakin prisoner here. I never could get their faces straight in my mind. The other one is dead. He burned up in the plane crash."

"Wonderful!" the THRUSH voice said. "Give him a complete interrogation on the machine. File a full report of all you learn from him. This will give us a full picture of how much U.N.C.L.E. knows of our present program. This is a wonderful break!"

"Then may I—liquidate—him after the interrogation?" Lupe asked with a vicious sidelong glance at Illya.

"You may have the pleasure, my dear!" the voice replied.

What hit Illya Kuryakin hardest was not the death sentence imposed on him, but Lupe's claim that Napoleon had burned to death in the plane.

He swallowed a huge lump in his throat and stared stonily at his captors.

Silently he promised himself that he would find some way to avenge Napoleon Solo before they destroyed him.

Lupe also turned to face the outpost crew.

"None of you are to leave this room until we get the interrogator over here!" she snapped.

She walked around to face Illya. He took a deep breath. The belts binding him to the chair cut into his arms.

"I'm willing to make a deal," he said in a toneless voice.

She smiled, cruelly. "I've been with THRUSH for five years. I was recruited right out of college and sent to work with that fool Santos-Lopez. So you see I have had plenty of experience with U.N.C.L.E. and its people. You do not make deals."

"Can I bring up one point to convince you that I might?" Illya said quietly, giving her a steady stare.

She gave him a sharp look back. "I'll listen to anything," she said.

"It is this," Kuryakin said. "What makes you think this is the only place where we were able to plant saboteurs?"

She started. She started breathing hard. Her face turned white.

Stabbing in the dark, but basing his supposition on her alarm, he said, "I know that this storm brewer is your baby. It means everything to you because you developed it from Santos-Lopez's basic data on storm destruction. You saw a way to twist his principles around. You sold the idea to THRUSH. You'll go high with them if it

works. You may not need any social security for your old age if it fails—for people who fail THRUSH don't have old ages. I might keep you from failing!"

"You're trying to trick me!" she snapped. "I can get everything out of your mind with the interrogation machine and you know it!"

"Can you?" Illya said and gave her a malicious grin. "What about this!"

He partially opened his mouth and made a quick flip of his tongue too fast for her to follow clearly.

"See it?" he said and sneered at her. "It's a mouth capsule—of poison, Lupe! I'm going to die anyway. I heard that voice from THRUSH pronounce sentence on me. I'm going to beat you to the punch! All I have to do is crush down on this thing with my teeth—and there'll be no mind left for you to probe!"

She sucked in her breath sharply. Her eyes searched his face, looking for some clue to the truth of his claim.

"I don't believe you!" she cried hoarsely.

Illya Kuryakin shrugged. "That's a chance you have to take. Shall I point out the saboteur here—as a mark of my good faith? Then if I prove right when you put him on the interrogator, maybe we can make a deal on what other U.N.C.L.E. men are hidden in your organization, here and in the Atlantic."

"I don't believe you!" she whispered again.

"Okay!" Illya said.

He looked over the silent, tense group of men across the room from them. He selected the one he least thought could possibly be the unknown saboteur.

"That's the one!" he said, nodning his head toward the man.

The man, small and with a rat-face, squeaked in alarm. "That's a lie! That's a lie! He's lying like a dog! Don't believe him. He—"

He lost his sense of judgment in his alarm. He started toward Lupe, his arms outstretched in fearful supplication.

"Stop!" Lupe snarled, and before the frightened man could obey she shot him.

The rest stared in silent fascination at the dead man. Illya's anxious eyes were scanning their faces. He was seeking some clue to which was the real saboteur.

When he first mentioned that he was going to reveal the man's name, the noticed the big brutish Polynesian unconsciously grip his fists. Then when he named the rat-faced man, the fists relaxed.

He thought this very curious. His eyes went back to the giant. It seemed impossible for this nearly naked native to know enough about the operations to sabotage it in the first place. And even more puzzling, what could be his motive?

Obviously the man lived on this island. He was here when the

THRUSH men came. He certainly was not an U.N.C.L.E. agent. And so far as Illya Kuryakin knew, no other organization was aware of these stormy operations.

He caught the giant's eye. The big Polynesian looked back at him dully, the very picture of brutish stupidity.

"It can't be," Illya told himself.

His eyes sought the faces of the others as they listened to the cold, murderous voice of Lupe de Rosa warn them that the same bullet would be waiting for any of them who tried to come toward her until she determined which was the traitor.

Illya stared at her, then looked back at the big Polynesian. The giant stared straight ahead, his face still a mask of stupidity.

"Maybe—" Illya told himself. "Maybe, but if he did—why?"

TWO

HIS THOUGHTS were interrupted by a thin chime from among the masses of electronic equipment. After warning the huddled group of men not to move, Lupe went over to the machine. Watching her, Illya could see why she had risen so high in THRUSH circles so fast. She was completely ruthless in furthering her ambitions.

Lupe de Rosa pressed a circuit switch. Immediately the voice they had heard before came out of the speaker.

"We have received reports from the *Waterloo* that the storm has maintained its strength. This indicates that the Pacific tests are now successful. What is your considered opinion in launching an immediate attack according to Plan A?"

"I am ready," the girl said firmly.

"Good!" the voice said. "We must know if U.N.C.L.E. is sufficiently aware of our activity to throw any kind of barrier in our way. As soon as the interrogator turns the mind of this U.N.C.L.E. man inside out, report at once."

"Yes, sir," Lupe said.

"Then if we are safe from U.N.C.L.E., the attack of storms against the East and West Coasts of the United States, Hawaii, Japan, India, France, England, the North Countries and the Mediterranean countries will be launched exactly twelve hours from now. Is there any technical reason why this should not be done?"

"None!" Lupe said firmly.

"Excellent. If this succeeds, you will be more than amply rewarded. You have earned our deepest gratitude."

The girl's face flushed with pleasure as the connection was broken. Kuryakin shivered as he thought of the utter devastation the chain of hurricanes and storms would bring to the world. He knew that meteorologists claimed the damage from one typhoon was equal to a thousand atom bombs. This meant that THRUSH's stormy attack would bring more destruction to the world than if all the nuclear powers on earth fired all their stockpiled atomic bombs. The terror, devastation and death would be beyond belief.

His grim thoughts were broken by a sudden bellow from the big Polynesian.

"Missy!" he cried, his deep voice sounded like the bass blast of a conch horn. "The prisoner! He moved! I think his arms loose!"

"What?" Lupe cried, whirling about. "Check him!"

"Yes, Missy!" the giant said and lumbered toward Illya. Kuryakin was sure now that he was the saboteur.

He waited breathlessly to see what trick the native would pull.

As the big man rounded the bank of computer cases, he suddenly grabbed one and overturned it. It smashed back into Lupe. She fell with a strangled cry. Her gun exploded into the bunker ceiling as she fell.

The giant whirled. His face no longer looked stupid. He caught the back of Illya's chair. He sent it and its bound occupant crashing into the men who charged him.

Illya and the chair crashed into the three men. They all sprawled in a heap. The wooden chair legs collapsed, leaving Kuryakin's arms still bound to the intact back.

Before any of them could scramble up, the native hit the light switch. In the wild melee in the dark Illya crawled to one side and got to his feet. He started to twist and strain in a frantic attempt to free himself.

Across the computer room the door opened. He glimpsed the native leaping out into the night. He tried to follow and crashed into one of the THRUSH men. They both fell. Before Kuryakin could get up, the lights came on. He saw one of the men aiming a savage blow at his head. He tried to dodge, but didn't make it.

The blow was not sufficient to knock him out, but it kicked him off balance. He fell and his head struck the edge of the upset computer. He sprawled flat. His senses reeled. He fought to hold his consciousness.

As if from a great distance he heard Lupe's outraged screams for the men to help her reset the fallen computer.

"The storm is out of control without it!" she cried.

As if in answer to her cry, the eye began to move from its stationary position over the atoll. The wild winds whipped toward the island.

ACT XI

THE PASSING STORM

NAPOLEON SOLO kept his eyes closed as the THRUSH man ordered the big Polynesian to leave him to burn in the flaming plane. The native moved the imprisoning log slightly in his first attempt to free the man from U.N.C.L.E. Solo was afraid to test it with the two still about.

The sounds from the back showed him that Kuryakin was captured. He knew that their only chance lay in himself staying free. He did not feel that he could capture the entire island alone. He hoped only to stay free long enough for the storm to pass. Then the atmospherics would clear up sufficiently for the pen-communicator to get a message out to U.N.C.L.E. headquarters.

After that it didn't matter what happened to him.

Out on the wing the flaming gasoline was spreading rapidly toward the cockpit. He knew he had only minutes left. He raised his head slowly. The pilot's compartment door was open. He could see the THRUSH men taking their Air Force prisoners out through the waist door.

If they looked around they could see him. But it was a risk he had to take.

The flames were so close to the cockpit that the heat was scorching through the metal skin of the plane.

He pushed against the log. He was unable to bulge it. The terrific heat of the encroaching fire was causing the sweat to roll down his face. The slight movement made by the Polynesian giant helped some. He could move slightly, but not enough to squeeze out.

He relaxed, panting from his exertions. The heat was becoming unbearable. He pressed his body up as tightly as he could against the imprisoning log. He reached in behind, struggling to loosen the belt that held the seat padding in place. He grabbed one end and tried to pull it free.

It came part of the way and stuck. He took a fresh grip and jerked again. His hand was so sweaty from the increasing heat that his fingers slipped. He hastily dried them on his trouser leg and took a fresh grip. He sucked in his stomach and pressed his body up, grating against the rough trunk of the tree.

He slowly pulled the padding away.

This gave him extra space and he started working his body free. It came slowly, tearing his clothing and in places raking the flesh raw.

He finally pulled himself free and fell back on the flight deck. The metal was unbearably hot. The plexiglass side windows suddenly shattered under the terrific heat of the burning wing. Flames licked

hungrily into the cockpit. Solo staggered back through the hatch into the waist of the plane.

He peered cautiously through the broken door. The THRUSH men had gone with their prisoners.

He hesitated, then jumped down to the ground. He bent almost double and scurried into the uprooted coconut grove to keep from presenting a target against the light of the blazing plane.

The typhoon devastation was terrific. The once densely palmed island had half its trees snapped or uprooted. Looking about, Napoleon could see the giant wall of the eye moving in. The storm was but half over. He realized he had only a short time before the island would again be lashed by the fury of the typhoon. Unless he found some sort of shelter, there was little chance that he would survive the storm.

He started to circle, seeking tracks in the wet sand to show him where the THRUSH men took their prisoners. He found the tracks leading up the beach. He was afraid to walk along the sand for fear he would be spotted. He took the difficult way, climbing over the broken, uprooted trees.

As he went he carefully checked his protective devices. The .38 special was still in his shoulder holster. In his pockets he carried several of the standard U.N.C.L.E. defensive equipment. The pen-communicator. A chewing gum that was actually a powerful explosive. A ring with a secret needle for dispensing knockout drops. Mints which developed a blinding smokescreen when dropped in water. A tie pin hiding a bulb of tear gas.

Each of them at one time or another had saved his life in a tight spot. Right then he had no idea what he could do or how he could use them, but he took comfort in their presence.

He continued to follow the trail until it branched. One line, with the most footprints led back toward the lagoon. The second, showing only the marks of three people.

Solo hesitated, knowing that he was throwing away any chance of success if he chose the wrong track. He got down on his hands and knees. The wet sand held the impression well, but he was unable to determine if either of the footprints belonged to Kuryakin. However, one definitely was a woman's print.

He got up, making a decision to follow it. He continued for several hundred yards and after climbing over a jumbled mass of uprooted trees, he came to a hill or large mound.

He stopped, suddenly suspicious. Such a formation was decidedly unusual on a normally flat coral island. Once it apparently had been covered with brush and vines. The storm had ripped these away. Under the torn areas he could see the marks of a concrete structure under the carefully arranged soil.

He circled it, seeking some kind of an entrance. He found it at the north end. Once it had been carefully screened by vines, but the typhoon had ripped them away.

"They must have taken Illya and the Air Force prisoners in there," he told himself.

He sat down on an uprooted palm. He was bone weary. His arms and legs ached from the struggle to keep the plane in the air. His skin burned.

Solo permitted himself only the briefest rest. Then he took a deep breath and tried to whip his flagging brain into action. A dozen wild plans turned over in his mind. He discarded every one as being impossible and wearily started over again.

He knew he could not expect to force the opening into the underground shelter. There was an excellent possibility he could blow an opening in the door with his explosive "chewing gum." Kneaded and fused with its almost microscopic cap, the U.N.C.L.E. developed super-explosive no bigger than a wad of gum packed the power of several sticks of dynamite.

However, he had no way of knowing what was immediately beyond the door. He would be sacrificing his element of surprise, his most precious asset, for little advantage.

He decided that his greatest chance of success lay in drawing the THRUSH men from the shelter where he could ambush as many as possible.

Once his decision was made, Napoleon Solo worked rapidly. He carefully prepared two wads of the gum explosive and stuck them to ends of sticks. These he carefully laid on the sand beside him. Then he took a third and attached it to a small splinter of wood.

He raised up slowly from his hiding place behind a tangled pile of storm riven trees. There seemed no guards about the outside of the THRUSH outpost.

He crept quickly to the side of the mound covering the structure. He pushed a hole in the wet sand, using a piece of stick. He adjusted the tiny automatic fuse, no bigger than a BB shot, for a five-minute time lag and hurried back to his protected spot.

He did not expect the explosion to break an opening. It wasn't designed for that. He was sure that this place had some connection with the THRUSH storm generating system. If so, that meant there would have to be considerable electronic equipment inside. He wanted to create a shock wave to throw the equipment off register. This, he hoped, would bring the operators rushing out to find the cause.

When they did, they would be met by a devastating bomb made by more gum explosive stuck to the wooden stick. He hoped under the confusion of this blast to get inside. Then if his suspicions were true

about the function of the bunker-type building, the third gum bomb would effectively destroy the interior.

It seemed an effective plan. The only thing that worried him was the whereabouts of the prisoners. He was sure that they were also in the bunker. An explosion to rip up the storm generating equipment could injure or even kill them. He hoped there was some way to avoid that, but if not, then he knew Illya Kuryakin would understand.

The lives of millions were more important than the lives of a few. Every U.N.C.L.E. agent knew this. As military men, the Air Force prisoners would understand as well.

Napoleon solo looked at the luminous dial of his watch. It had been but a single minute since he placed the charge. This surprised him. It seemed an age. He shook the watch to make sure it was running.

Then, as he looked up, he saw something move in the darkness behind him. He whirled. There was a rustling of the broken palms for the utter stillness of the typhoon eye was starting to break with some wind as the wall of clouds moved closer to the atoll with the passing of the eye. A few drops of rain were starting to fall.

Napoleon looked anxiously at the sky, hoping the full fury of the returning storm would hold off until he completed his mission.

If he could destroy the outpost, he would consider himself paid for. After that, if he came out of it alive, he had plenty to live for. If not—well, it had been a good life while it lasted. He couldn't complain.

He turned back to watch for the explosion, sure that what he had seen was a wind-blown palm. Then out of the corner of his eye he caught another suspicious movement. This time it was too definite to be his imagination.

He whirled, jerking his hand toward his shoulder holster. He was just a fraction of a second late. His assailant swung at his head with a piece of wooden pole. Solo ducked, but his legs bumped against the mass of uprooted trees. It threw him off balance and he took the savage blow on the shoulder. It knocked him to his knees. He glimpsed the flash of brown skin as his unknown attacker tried to hit again.

This time the tree trunks interferred with his assailant. Napoleon ducked another blow and managed to get the gun out. He got his first good look at his attacker. He started with surprise. It was a girl—a native in a sarong she wore as beautifully as if she came from a technicolored Hollywood film.

TWO

SHE HESITATED in the face of his gun.

"Don't move!" Solo said.

She stood staring at him. The

rising wind whipped her hair. He couldn't see her face too clearly in the darkness. Suddenly she leaped back, jumping over two entwined broken trees. She dropped out of sight.

Napoleon Solo heard her move. She seemed to be circling, seeking a chance to attack him again. Suddenly he started. He wondered why his usually sharp mind had not noticed the most peculiar thing about her before.

This was how quietly she fought him. Had she been attached to THRUSH she would surely have called for help.

"Where are you?" he called softly. "Don't be afraid. I am not one of them. I am their enemy who came by the *vakalele.*"

The rustling noise ceased.

"Don't you understand?" he said. "If I was one of them, I would have shouted for help. I am their enemy and your friend."

This argument was telling. She realized the same as he that a THRUSH agent would have yelled. He would not have fought in silence as they both did, each afraid of alerting the enemy inside the bunker.

She stepped back into the small clearing.

Napoleon Solo looked at his watch. There was still two minutes before the explosion.

"You came in the boat that flies?" she said, her voice low and as sweet as he always imagined

the brown-skinned beauties of the Far Pacific islands.

"Yes," he said. "What are these men doing here? How can we help each other?"

"They are evil men!" she said fiercely. "They came to our island. They threatened us with death. They forced our people to build and slave for them."

"What are they doing here?"

"I do not know," she said. "But my—the man I love, he knows. He is the son of the talking chief and very smart. He went to the native college in Laie and then came back here. He said they were very evil men and he would find out what they were doing and when the British commissioner makes his annual inspection, he would tell him."

"Where is your boy friend now?" Solo asked. "Perhaps he and I can work together."

"He is in there," she pointed at

the closed door of the bunker. "He is very big and very strong. They use him for their work slave. He makes them think he is stupid so he can learn what they are doing,"

"I see," Napoleon said, remembering the big Polynesian who tried to free him in the plane.

"Oh, I am so afraid for him!" the girl cried. "That is why I came here to watch. I am afraid they will find him spying and kill him!"

"We'll help him," Napoleon assured her. "How about your people? How many of them can we trust to help us?"

"They will do what Kahlihi tells them," she said.

"Can you arrange for me to talk to Kahlihi?"

"He is with the bad men," she replied. "Even I cannot get to talk to him. That is why I came here in the storm. I just want to see him."

"Then can I talk to your next chief?"

"Nobody will talk to you unless Kahlihi orders," she replied. "They fear all strangers."

"But can't—"

"There is nothing anyone can do. These bad men have placed a terrible taboo on this end of the island. Any of our people who come here, except those chosen for slaves, die by the death lights?"

"What are the death lights?"

"They placed them around this end of the island. They work night and day and anyone approaching this place dies. The storm tore them down and so I came, hoping just to see my beloved. Just a glimpse of him is all I ask. Then I could sneak away. After the storm they will replace the lights."

There was a resigned defiance on the girl's face that told him she spoke the truth. Mentally he drew a line through the idea that he might get native help. Whatever he did he must do alone.

"What about you?" he asked. "Will you help me?"

"If Kahlihi tell me to," she replied.

Napoleon Solo sighed, defeated. "Well, I guess—"

He broke off startled by the sudden opening of the bunker door. The big Polynesian came bounding through it. Napoleon saw the shadow of someone running after him. He saw the outline of a gun raised in the shadow's hand.

The girl screamed. Napoleon tried to grab her hand, but she broke away, running to help her lover.

Solo jerked his gun out and half raised up from behind the protecting barrier of trees.

Before he could shoot to protect the hysterical girl, the charge he set went off. Wet sand and debris shot into the air. The ground rocked. The shot fired at her went wild. Shooting before the sound of the explosion died, Napoleon put a shot into the body of the THRUSH man. Then he jumped the storm piled debris and ran toward the

bunker door, carrying his improvised gum bomb.

A shot whined past his ear. Someone was shooting at him from inside the door. He threw himself flat, scrambling for cover. Another bullet smacked into the coconut log.

"Give me some help! I think it's that other rat from U.N.C.L.E.!" the gunman yelled back inside the bunker. "He wasn't burned after all!"

"Get on the intercom radio!" Napoleon recognized Lupe de Rosa's voice. "Call the submarine! Tell them to send men up here at once!"

THREE

THE WIND was rising fast. The rain was getting harder. Napoleon Solo knew the full fury of the typhoon would be upon him within minutes. His chances of survival here in the open were slim. Even if he lived, he would come out of it so beaten and exhausted he could not possibly hope to elude the searchers Lupe was sending to hunt him.

He felt he had only one slim chance—and he took it. He jumped up, even though it presented a perfect target for the gunman and hurled the gum bomb at the open doorway.

As he threw, he heard the report of the THRUSH gun. But the gunman fired too quickly, startled as he was by the unexpected appearance of Solo. The bullet went wild and Napoleon fell flat, scrambling for protection behind the fallen trees.

As he fell, the gum bomb went off. It was a larger charge than the one he set in the ground to pull attention out of the bunker. It ripped the concrete facing around the door, and ripped the heavy wooden barrier from its hinges.

Smoke, debris and dust from the shattered concrete choked the opening. Solo, gun clutched in his hand, leaped the fallen trees and darted toward the opening. The wind was increasing in fury by the second. Napoleon could only hope that he could get inside before the wind flushed the dust and smoke away.

He charged into the blinding cloud, bumped against the shattered door and pressed against the inside wall. He held his gun ready to shoot at the first sign of a target.

"Put up your hands, Mr. Solo!"

It was Lupe de Rosa's voice, cold and deadly.

"I have you squarely in the sights of an infra-red scope!" she went on. "You know I can see you perfectly in the dark!"

Her voice echoed so that Napoleon could not place her position. He let the gun and the last remaining gum bomb drop from his hands to the floor.

"Get a light!" Lupe snapped. "And shore up that broken door. The storm is moving again. I don't

want the rain ruining our equipment."

Light flooded the room. Napoleon Solo saw the girl standing across the room with a THRUSH gun aimed at him.

There were two THRUSH men across from her. Illya Kuryakin lay on the floor by Lupe's feet. His hands were bound to a chair back. Remnants of the rest of the chair were scattered, showing Illya had put up some kind of battle. His legs were free. Kuryakin didn't move.

Napoleon flicked a quick glance at the two THRUSH men. Neither seemed to be armed, but he could not be sure.

"Bind him!" Lupe snapped, motioning toward Solo. "I want his mind dredged by the interrogation machine before he's shot. This is a break. The other one may be dead, but we can still find out what U.N.C.L.E. knows about our work. Where is that machine? Get on the intercom and call the sub after you tie him up."

The two men came toward Solo, but Lupe was too smart for him. When he tensed, she warned the men: "Get back, you fools! Don't come between my gun and that U.N.C.L.E. rat!"

The two men jumped aside, split and circled around the bank of electronic equipment to come at Napoleon Solo from different sides.

Solo shot them a quick glance. Neither appeared to be armed—probably because Lupe did not trust them. He cut his eyes back for the briefest contact with Kuryakin. Illya gave him a nod.

Suddenly Illya kicked the side of a computer with his unbound foot. Lupe jumped at the unexpected noise. She jerked her head around. The two men stopped to look back.

In that brief instant of their inattention, Napoleon Solo ducked behind a line of computers. He grabbed the corner of an electronic cabinet and overturned it as the two men leaped for him.

Lupe gave a strangled cry of rage and whirled to bring her gun to bear on Solo as he raised up to overturn another cabinet to slow down the two men pursuing him.

Illya Kuryakin lurched to his feet. His hands were still bound to the chair back, but he bent low and rammed his head into the small of the girl's back. She fell and her head smashed against the side of a computer.

Kuryakin turned and kicked at the gun that fell from her nerveless fingers.

He sent it skidding down the path between the banks, directly toward Solo.

Napoleon stooped to grab it, but before he could straighten up, one of the THRUSH men leaped on his back. They both fell. Solo twisted to avoid a knee in his stomach.

The second man's foot slammed down on his wrist as he sought to jerk the gun up. The first man

caught Solo with a savage kick in the ribs. Napoleon managed to catch his foot with his one free hand. The THRUSH man fell heavily on top of Solo.

Kuryakin came charging toward them. He was still unable to free his hand, but he caught the second THRUSH man with a hard drive of his hunched shoulder, knocking the man back against another of the long line of electronic cabinets.

Freed momentarily of the double menace, Napoleon Solo caught his opponent with a hard blow to the chin. The man's head snapped back and his eyes glazed. Napoleon grabbed the THRUSH gun with his left hand. As his opponent tried to jump him again, Solo pulled the trigger. He whirled as the second assailant tried to duck around Kuryakin. Solo pulled the trigger a second time.

Kuryakin stepped back quickly to avoid the falling body. He grinned at his battered partner.

"I've been glad to see a lot of things in my life, "he said. "But never have I been so glad to see anyone as I was you!"

Solo tried to grin back, but his mouth was too battered by a blow he never even knew he took. "And I guess Waverly was right," he said through his puffy lips. "You are the difference!"

"What do we do now?" Illya asked as Napoleon unbound his arms.

"What do you know about this stuff?" he waved his hands at the electronic gear still operating.

"From what I overheard," Illya said. "There are three of these outposts. It takes a radiation feed from all three to keep the storm going. The *Waterloo* focuses the transmitted beams and directs the storm. "That big black box in the center is the transmitter."

"Then let's see what happens," Solo said. He raised the THRUSH gun and put three quick shots through the plexiglass window in front. Bulbs shattered and there was a flash of blue light as the circuit shorted.

For a moment it seemed to have no effect, the increasing fury of the storm battered at the broken door of the bunker.

"I guess it didn't—" Illya began.

The rest of his words were lost in a tremendous explosive sound like the crash of a hundred bombs. The concrete bunker shook with the violent force of a severe earthquake. The lights went out. Two great cracks ripped across the concrete ceiling.

Water poured in. The rain suddenly became a solid mass of water as the clouds dumped their entire contents at once.

"We had better get out of here!" Illya Kuryakin shouted above the din. "This ceiling looks like it is going to come all the way down any second!"

"We'll drown outside!" Solo shouted back.

"Okay! So you get to pick the way you want to die!"

"Then let's drown! It's better than being crushed!" Solo said.

They started for the door, but by the time they arrived, the clouds were gone, wrung dry by that one great deluge.

Water ran a foot deep in the bunker and across the island. But the sky over head showed stars to all horizons.

"Great!" Illya said. "We should be able to get a call in to Mr. Waverly. We have definite proof now. He can get Air Force planes out to sink the *Waterloo.*"

"Then there is the matter of the Air Force prisoners," Solo said.

"They were taken to the submarine for safe keeping. It is in the lagoon."

"We'll have to do something about that," Napoleon said.

"What can we do?" Illya asked.

"We can figure out something, I guess," Solo said. "Do you mind if I pass that detail to you?"

But as it happened, this was not necessary. The girl, Alomá, came running to meet them. Breathlessly she told Solo that her lover, the big Polynesian, had rallied his people after he escaped from the bunker. Those in the sub had not heard of his deflection and opening the hatch when he called. He held it open until his war party broke in. They took the vessel.

Illya Kuryakin looked at the girl with open admiration.

"Say, Solo," he said, "Ask her if she's got a sister?"

"Sister?" the girl said, "Oh, yes, I get!"

"Wait!" Napoleon said. "He was just joking. He—"

"Speak for yourself!" Illya retorted.

A few minutes later, after they made sure that the THRUSH sub crew was completely subdued, Napoleon Solo contacted Mr. Waverly on the pen-communicator.

He gave a brief report. Waverly promised to get planes and ships out to locate the *Waterloo* and the other two outposts. At the same time, they would send search planes into the Pacific and Indian oceans to find the storm generating positions there.

"We have Lupe de Rosa under guard," Napoleon said. "She's still pretty dizzy from a blow on the head. As soon as she is able we'll interrogate her under the truth serum. I think then we will have the complete story and locations. That will wind up the whole affair."

"Excellent, Mr. Solo," Mr. Waverly said. "And how is Mr. Kuryakin?

"Great!" Napoleon said. "You know that pretty native girl I told you helped us?"

"You mean that she and Kuryakin—?"

"No, sir. She has a native boy friend. Illya asked her if she had a sister. She did."

"Oh, so Mr. Kuryakin and the

sister are looking at the tropic moon?"

"Yes, sir, and is she lovely. The biggest brown eyes you ever saw. Wavy hair down to her shoulders. A laughing mouth. And she is wearing a genuine grass skirt."

"Hmmm!" the U.N.C.L.E. chief said. "Maybe I'd better hurry that plane out for you before Mr. Kuryakin goes native."

"Oh, I don't know," Solo said. "You see Aloma either didn't understand what Illya meant when he asked if she had a sister or she is a great kidder. Just a minute I'll tune you in on the romance—"

In New York the U.N.C.L.E. chief was startled to hear his agent's voice say: "No! No. It's 'Pat-a-cake, pat-a-cake, *baker's* man—"

Then a tiny voice said, "Pat-eee —cake, Pat—ee-cake—"

"What?" Waverly said.

"That's right," Solo replied. "The sister is almost, but not quite three years old!"

Waverly chuckled. "Tell Mr. Kuryakin I said, 'Better luck next time!' "

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DOOM OVER KAREETA

Famine and disaster, twin scourges of death, lay over our underwater home. Only the pygmies above us could help—and they lived in a mad, cruel world.

THERE WAS a swell moving in from the Deep. Even here in the Council Place, where it was sheltered they could feel it and see the phosphoresence flickering under the quickening pulse of the waters. Out in the Deep the waters would be surging heavily. There would be damage on the outlying hydrofarms, and another bad harvest.

Dilwan, swimming in powerfully to the centre of the throng, could sense the mood of despair that hung over everyone. He looked down towards the mass of dark figures huddled on the sea-bed, and remembered what his father had

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A previously published story is not necessarily a permanently preserved story, available to anyone. Too often, in fact, it is just the opposite. So transitory is magazine publication alone —usually thirty days on sale—that far too many outstanding tales are overlooked and forgotten before they have their deserved chance at fame and recognition. Here, in this department, you will read some of the most unusual stories ever written. The present story, "Doom Over Kareeta," by John Christopher, is no exception. Mr. Christopher, an English author of discerning wit and unexcelled ability, exploded into the science fiction-fantasy field a few years ago with his brilliant serial "No Blades of Grass," which appeared in the SATURDAY EVENING POST *and was subsequently sold to the movies for a price said to be over a hundred thousand dollars. This short story shows beyond argument his peculiar genius for depicting the occult and the weird. Read it with care and discrimination. It's a story which has been selected as too good to be forgotten. You'll remember it!*

THE EDITORS

told him of the last days of Serbena.

Dilwan himself had been born during those days, when the harvests had failed for the last time and the giant sharks had breached the defences and torn a path of destruction through the doomed city. In a vague way, he could even remember fragmentary details of the terror-fraught journey across the Deep to Kareeta.

But most of what he remembered came from the stories his father had told him, many seasons before. Of the inky, nonphosphorescent blackness of the Deep. Of the huge forest of squids into which they had blundered, and where his mother had died. Of the flashing, bloody stories of sharks, as they swept down on the tattered fugitives from Serbena.

And at last, of the sight of the walls of Kareeta where they had found safety.

All that was ninety seasons ago.

More than seventy seasons had passed since his father had been killed by the sharks while working on an outlying hydrofarm.

In that time Kareeta, season by season, had slipped nearer to the doom that had overwhelmed her sister-city.

Each season the scavenger-fish preyed more openly on the hydro-fields, swooping down in the wake of the shark bands and laying waste acres of cultivated land. The two races had evolved a strange, menacing symbiosis; as though they were deliberately combining to exterminate the Kranaki and crush intelligence in the world of water. And they were only part of the doom hanging, more and more ominously, over Kareeta.

Each season the squids advanced more openly up the sides of the Deep. They had overwhelmed the whaling station at Purka. And the whales themselves were less and less tractable. Fewer returned to their pens each season. Those that did frequently turned on their Kranaki masters.

Finally, in the last thirty seasons, eruptions and land-quakes had occurred with greater and greater frequency, bringing with them swells and storms, splitting and laying waste the hydro-farms and shaking Kareeta itself.

It seemed to the Kranaki that the end could not be long delayed. And with the end of Kareeta would come the end of their race. There was no other city to which the survivors could retreat. Since the fall of Serbena, Kareeta had been the only stronghold of the Kranaki.

Dilwan stopped swimming, and allowed the current to carry him gently into the place reserved for him on the dais. They had been waiting for him. He relaxed and listened.

The President, Balakon, began speaking, slapping the water with his huge flippers into impulses that rippled out to the antennae of the waiting Kranaki.

He said: "The allotment of *pilner* will be halved from the beginning of next season. All the *pilner* crops in the hydro-fields to the northwest have been destroyed by the last eruption."

A sigh rippled round and in towards the dais, emanating from hundreds of flippers. Dilwan felt the shock; a realization of the desperate situation. Without *pilner* the Kranaki could not live. On half their present allotment they would be perilously near to starvation.

Balakon went on: "In the last season over a hundred Kranaki have been killed; mostly by sharks, a few by squids, three by rebellious whales. Our numbers are now less than seven hundred. But even for seven hundred our harvests are too meagre.

"The fewer there are, the fewer we can spare for guards, and the more easily can the sharks break through to ravish the farms and

even the outskirts of the city itself. We must break this stranglehold if Kareeta is not to die."

He paused, waiting for the impulses of despair to die out of the water.

"I can remember," Balakon continued, "when the Kranaki held five great cities and numbered more than a hundrd thousand. That was only eight hundred seasons ago. In the times of our grandfathers the Kranaki cities spread out in hundreds to the further seas; to the warm seas of the south and to the cold seas that stretched beyond to the ice. And round the cities, league after league, lay the hydro-farms, growing a multitude of crops that now are only a memory."

He stopped for a while, remembering. "When I was very young," he said, "I tasted *charang*. It had a lightness and warmth and beauty in it, so that your body felt as insubstantial as a floater when you had eaten it. It grew only in the cold beyond the warm, in the gardens of the city of Charbera, which died seven hundred seasons ago. There will be no more *charang*." . .

A current swept through the Council Place, stirring the tendrils of the Kranaki with thoughts of the storms swirling up from the Deep around them.

Balakon said: "In the days of our grandfathers the Kranaki ruled from cold to warm and on to cold again; from the bottom of the Deeps to the thin waters above. The whales came and went at our bidding; the sharks cowered away from us in the thin waters, and our ancestors hunted them for sport. We were supreme until—the Shock.

"You have all heard of it; of the days when the sea-bed crumbled beneath our cities and substances bubbled up, turning the water into thin, blindingly hot mist. Only in the far south and here in the north did a few cities survive; cities that have fallen one by one before the attack of the sharks and the squids, and the tremblings of the sea-bed. Now there is only Kareeta, and it seems impossible that Kareeta can survive another ten seasons if indeed that long."

The vibrations of despair rocked more violently through the waters of the Council Place. Dilwan, listening, realized that the calm pronouncements of Balakon were grimly reinforcing the sense of doom that hung over the Kranaki. Each must have known the end was near, and hoped to be mistaken.

Balakon spoke with a dreadful, inescapable authority. And yet Balakon himself had planned the one possible way of salvation. Now he went on, firmly over-riding the despair about him.

"It seems impossible," Balakon said, "but there is one chance of saving our race. For thousands of seasons, among the things that have dropped into our depths from the thin water there have been

some that were not dead fish but strange, artificial creations containing queerly-formed, dead pygmies."

It is in our history that these creations have changed throughout the seasons, becoming more complex as though fashioned by a race of growing culture and ingenuity. We thought for a long time that the pygmies who must have made them lived in the thin water, and that these, perhaps, were their funeral vessels, designed to carry their dead into what, to them, would be the mysterious depths below.

"For thousands of seasons our ancestors planned how they might establish contact with the pygmies, and perhaps help them in their struggles against their enemies. Some of their bodies that we found had had limbs torn by our own enemies, the sharks. But by ourselves we could not penetrate up into the thin water. It was not until a few hundred seasons before the Shock that Ralbaned, the great hydro-farmer, developed that new hard, transparent coral of which Kareeta is built, and adapted it to the creation of pressure-suits moulded to our shapes.

"Since then our adventurers have swum up through the thin water and found a world of thin mist lying above it, and learned that the pygmies live on the bed of that mist, using their strange vessels to cross the intervening waters. When the Shock came we were preparing to send large expeditions to meet them.

"Even since the Shock our adventurers have dared the thin waters and the blockade of sharks to see this strange world above us. And we have kept a watcher at our last outpost, Berdan.

"A tunnel leads up to Berdan, a tunnel which the sharks have not yet found. Once at Berdan our watchers are safe from them, for Berdan itelf is surrounded on all sides by the air-bed on which the pygmies live. For a season at a time the watchers stay, burdened by pressure-suits, trying to make contact with the pygmies. But as the watchers could only plunge into the mist for a fraction of time, they have always failed. The pygmies do not recognize them, expect, perhaps, as strange fish.

"Now, in the time of our greatest need, another hydro-farmer has found what may be the solution to our desperate plight. Dilwan, a native of lost Serbena, has found a means of lining the pressure-suits with a new form of sponge. In the new pressure-suit a Kranak can venture into the mist, protected from thinness by the coral, and from waterlessness by the sponge. At last we can meet the pygmies on their own air-bed!

"We will go to them, and they will help us against our mutual enemies, the sharks, and give us their strange, fashioned things to help on the hydro-farms, while we in

turn teach them of all the richness that lies on the sea-bed for those that have the strength to take it. Nothing will be able to stand against the combined force of the Kranaki and the pygmies.

"But it will not be easy to penetrate the mist. Even with the new pressure-suits it will be an agonizing adventure, only to be borne for a short time. We must send an emissary, who can first prove our intelligence to the pygmies. Dilwan, who made this venture possible, has asked to be allowed to go, and we have given permission. Dilwan! The future—the very existence—of the Kranaki depends on your mission. May the Ruler of the Deep attend you!"

Dilwan heard the chorusing vibrations. "The Ruler of the Deep attend you!"

He felt inside himself the pride of the Kranaki, of the race that had once held the oceans to their furthest reaches. On him the future depended, and he would not fail them.

Two of the Kranaki floated down to him, holding the artificially-shaped coral that was to protect him from the thinness above. He wriggled into it, and when the head-piece had been pulled down the coral insects were set to work on the join, to seal them until his return.

Only a small gap was left, so that water could continue to flood in around him. He would not seal this with coral until, at Berdan, he was ready to meet the pygmies.

Now, with powerful strokes, he swam above the Council of Kranaki. For a moment he watched them, feeling their vibrations of hope and goodwill beating even through the enclosing coral. Then, with a steady, powerful motion, he was swimming away from Kareeta.

Six young Kranaki swam with him, spared from the desperately urgent need of the harvest to protect him against sharks until he reached the mouth of the tunnel.

Half a dozen sharks eddied down, but sheered away quickly at the sight of the seven Kranaki. Dilwan gelt a surge of vicious hatred against them and their cowardly avoidance of battle except when they outnumbered the Kranaki by four or five to one. The hatred changed into triumph as he thought of his own mission, and how its success would put weapons into the hands of the Kranaki.

We shall hunt them down, he thought with grim satisfaction, we and the pygmies. We shall hunt them until not a shark remains in the oceans. Even the small ones in the thin water we shall destroy. And the cities of the Kranaki shall rise again.

II

ROGER BLAINE groaned in more than spiritual anguish. The road seemed to be turning into a sticky

river of molten lead. The front wheel of his bicycle was continually popping the bubbles of tar that swelled up in front of them, while ahead, waves of heat shimmered up like a wall of mist bteween the loch and the forested hills.

He felt as though he had been cycling for years through a section of Dante's Inferno. And Hilda looked as cool and unperturbed as ever.

"Take it easy," he panted. "What are you using for power—atomic energy?"

His wife smiled sweetly at him. "Just ordinary muscle power, darling," she replied. "I told you you were getting too flabby. This sort of holiday is just what you need. Wait till I've had you up and down Ben Nevis a few times! You'll be a different man."

"I won't last that long," he prophesied gloomily. "Another hundred yards of this and I shall melt into a grease ball and evaporate. When I think of the things you told me about the cool Scottish valleys and lochs, I feel that my faith in woman is shaken for ever."

Hilda smiled. "Hold on," she said. "It's less than a mile now to Invermoriston. I should hate to think of you melting away when almost in sniffing distance of a nice long, cool pint of beer. Contemplate the beauties of Ness and forget the heat.

"You might see the monster! As a qualified zoologist, you could classify it. Think of it—*draco Blainensis!*"

Roger grunted. "Any monster with any sense would keep well under in this weather. Anyway, it's too early in the day, and the weather's too clear. For the creation of the Loch Ness monster you need a nice misty evening full of shadows, a preliminary oiling of good, strong Scotch, and a Celtic imagination.

"Given those three, you stand a chance of seeing monsters by the million."

"You skeptical scientists!" Hilda protested. "Just because you haven't got their bones neatly docketed in the Natural History Museum in Kensington, sea-monsters can't possibly exist. When it should be obvious that, if they live at the bottom of the ocean, you could never by any chance find their remains."

Roger mopped his sweating brow with a handkerchief. If anything, it was getting a little hotter, incredible as it seemed.

"There are at least two very good reasons for disbelieving the Loch Ness monster story," he said wearily. "In the first place, it is difficult to see how the monster could get along the Caledonian Canal from Inverness to the loch without being spotted, and no one has yet reported its presence in the canal. In the second, if the monster lives, as you claim, at the bottom of the ocean, then the difference in pressure at the surface of

the water would kill it immediately."

"Not valid," Hilda declared. "In the first place, the monster might have been in the loch for hundreds of years, or there might be a subterranean entrance somewhere. And in the second, it might be a tough monster, able to withstand different pressures. There could be all sorts of reasons. You're just a dogmatic scientist. I hope the monster comes after you!"

"I'll try the Scotch this evening, and brush up my imagination," he promised.

"We'll see about that," his wife said grimly.

At last the road bent away from the loch, and the welcome sight of the Invermoriston Hotel lay before them. With surprising speed Roger parked his bicycle and disappeared into the lobby. When Hilda followed him, she found him contemplating the remains of a pint of beer.

"Your watch was slow," he said reproachfully. "We almost didn't make it. It's a quarter to two."

"Lemonade would have been just as good for you," Hilda said, ignoring his instinctive shudder. "But I've good news for you. They have some room here. As it will probably be past three o'clock by the time we finish lunch, I thought we might have a rest and set off for Fort Augustus in the morning. I think you've lost enough fat for one day."

Roger rolled his eyes up. "Saved at the eleventh hour!" he murmured. "This calls for another drink."

Hilda watched the beer vanish. "Come on," she said. "Lunch is ready. If we get it over quickly we can go for a ramble up the Moriston."

She dragged him away, protesting.

It was not until evening, however, that Hilda succeeded in getting him away from the hotel, and then he refused point-blank to walk up the winding Moriston, insisting instead on the shorter walk to the loch.

And at Dalcataig Pier he insisted on resting, developing a sudden passion for contemplating the beauties of Ness.

The scene was impressive. Behind them rose the hilly forests of Portclair and Invermoriston, dark, tossing green in the evening breeze.

In front lay the purple loch and, further on, the gently rising heights beyond Glen Albyn. The sun which had set behind Portclair was still lingering on the house-tops of Invermoriston.

A boat came into Dalcataig Pier, and men got out, workers from the aluminum works on the other side of the loch. Roger and Hilda heard them talking excitedly as they passed.

"Och! Wullie McKay saw it. He said you couldna mistake it. It's the auld monster again. I ken fine

we'll have the newspaper bodies doon with us again noo."

"There you are," Hilda said triumphantly. "It's back!"

Roger smiled the superior, irritating smile of one who knows better. "Let's get back to the hotel," he said. "I want to stoke my imagination up."

As they were turning back from Dalcataig they met a man running towards them. He called breathlessly:

"Tak heed! Thte monster's in the Moriston, wallowing like a whale. I'm off to the Pier for a gun."

There was no disputing his sincerity or sobriety. Without a word, Roger and Hilda began to run towards the river Moriston. They reached the bridge to find all the inhabitants of the tiny village assembled up on it.

Then they saw it, wallowing up the small river from the loch. A vast, scaly neck rose from the water, upholding a long, flat head that peered dazedly about, as though the tranquil light of the Scottish twilight were too brilliant for it.

Its body stretched behind, an impressive bulk tapering into flippers in parts. Just under the neck were two membranous tendrils, projecting stiffly like spears. It moved awkwardly up the river towards the bridge.

For a moment the villagers stayed, gazing at the invader in stark disbelief. Then they fled, panic-stricken, back to their houses. Hilda felt like joining them, but Roger was leaning so far forward over the bridge in his anxiety to take in all details of the monster that she felt obliged to hang on to his coat, in case he overbalanced and fell into the river.

The monster seemed to notice the villagers streaming away, and made a move towards the bank as though to follow them. But the pull of the water was too much for it, and it fell back defeated. Rolling in mid-stream, it lifted its head towards the bridge again, and saw the two people still standing there. The long, scaly neck moved towards them.

Hilda felt like screaming. Roger was gazing at the approaching monster as though it were the Holy Grail. His nose caught the thick, fishy smell of the sea. He stared at the broad, serpentine head and the gleaming eyes.

There was a cry from the south bank, and he saw the Scot they had passed on the road running towards them, waving a rifle.

"Ye're all richt?" the Scot shouted. "Hauld on—I've got a bullet for it."

Roger shouted back frantically: "No, no! Don't shoot for God's sake. *It's wearing a diving suit!*"

The Scot levelled his rifle. "I'm nae fashed if it's wearin' a kilt," he called. "It's not coming up the Moriston!"

The shot rang out above Roger's

frantic appeals. The monster reared as a bullet hit it in the neck. There was a brief, high whistling, as though a balloon were being deflated, and the long neck slumped forward into the water.

Roger dashed down to the bank, and into the river, with Hilda following.

"It can't be dead," he muttered. "A single bullet can't stop an elephant, let alone a thing like this. Unless . . . I can't believe it!"

The head had fallen sideways, so that it projected a little from the water. Roger bent over it, his lips tight. After a moment he looked up at Hilda watching from the bank.

The villagers had begun to swarm back, realizing that the monster had been overthrown.

Roger said: "It's dead, all right. Diagnosis—multiple internal ruptures. The same as we would have if suddenly transported into a vacuum. That shot merely punctured its protective covering."

Hilda said: "You mean . . . ?"

"That it was an intelligent being!" Roger exclaimed. "I guessed it from the bridge, when that fool was waving his gun about. God, what a waste!" He climbed wearily out of the water.

"Maybe another one will follow it," Hilda said reassuringly. "The natives can be warned. Next time it will be different."

Roger looked back over the bridge. The villagers were clustered in excited groups, looking down on the monster where it lay with the water washing over it.

"Maybe," he said. "If there *is* a next time."

III

THE LAST quake had brought down several pillars of the Council Place. A strong current was flowing through Kareeta, brushing the phosphorescent organisms into startling lambency. Balakon looked round at the huddled Kranaki.

"We must still hope," he signalled. "A young, strong Kranak such as Dilwan could last a whole season in a pressure-suit. Perhaps he is having difficulty in convincing the pygmies of the urgency of our plight. We must hope that he will come back. We have tried to duplicate the pressure-suit he made, but the sponge does not breed true. We might stumble on it again tomorrow—or never.

"And the harvest is worse, even than we had feared it would be. Kareeta can only survive a few more seasons.

"We must hope Dilwan will come back."

The Kranaki huddled silently about the dais from which their leader spoke. High above circled a school of giant sharks, watching and waiting with timeless malignance.

A MAN NAMED VINELLI

A NOVELET OF CHILLING SUSPENSE

by BILL PRONZINI

Across the black Straits was everything I wanted—money, a new life, a chance to be a man again. But there was something waiting also. A thing called sudden Death!

THE RED-ORANGE Singapore sun lay just outside the glassless window of the crib in Punyang Alley. A shaft of harsh, white light stabbed like pin-pricks across my eyes.

I lay naked and bathed in a thin sheen of sweat on the bare mattress. Pain bit into my temples. I lay very still, my eyes squeezed shut against the light.

I could hear the Javanese fan on the dresser whirring softly. Warm, stale air touched my face. My head was clogged with heavy fuzziness, like the inside had been wrapped in thick cotton.

I raised my arm to rub sweat from my face. Wetness flowed on my thighs. There was a sharp burning at my groin.

At first, I could remember nothing. Then, as I lay there, disjointed pieces of the night began to fuse slowly into a vague semblance of a whole. Dark, hazy rooms, and faceless men, and the lilting singsong of Chinese voices, and through it all the liquor flowing like a deluge of bitter kerosene.

And then, finally, the surrealistic jumble ended at a wall of deep blackness, and there was nothing more.

The void. The forerunner of the last one that is death, in which

there is no time and a man ceases to exist.

How many times there, Vinelli? I thought. How many lost hours?

I put my hands beneath me on the damp mattress and raised myself to a sitting position. A slash of fire was behind my eyes. I pushed back the mosquito netting, and sat on the edge of the mattress with my head hanging between my knees.

I needed a drink. Just one. To steady my hands and cleanse away

the thick cotton and the taste of old vomit that clung like phlegm in the back of my throat. Just one drink.

You take that one, like the sick man with his bottled medicine, and you begin to feel better again. But then it comes back on you, how bad you feel, and you take another one, and another, and after that there is no counting. You have caught on to the vicious cycle again, and it is a one-way trip into the void.

Do you know where you are then? You're down. You're like a hundred other men in the tropics, tired drifters, leftovers from another generation and another age. You stand in the rubble of dead dreams and faded youth, and you think, *This is what I have lived my life for.* Flat, brown bottles and half-remembered images. Just that, nothing more.

I stood from the bed. There was tightness in my thighs and calfs. I walked slowly to the basin at the far end of the crib.

A face stared at me from the wall-mirror, a square face, with skin like dried leather. The grey eyes were sunken now like dark holes, hiding. Yes, I thought. I am standing in the rubble.

I took the chipped carafe from the shelf under the mirror. A fat, ginger-colored cockroach lay there, shining in the light. I crushed it with the edge of my hand.

I filled the carafe with cold water and poured it over my head and neck. There was a stinging across my neck, and in the mirror I could see the ugly red blotches of what the Malays call the *roote hond.* Prickly heat. I have lived in the South China Seas for twenty years, but I have never learned to live with the heat.

I wiped the sweat from the rest of my body with the shredded towel, and put on the short sleeved bush jacket and the spotted khaki trousers. In the pocket of the khakis I found crumpled bills. Two Singapore dollars. Sixty-five cents, American.

After that, there was nothing at all.

I went out into the heat.

CHINEE'S is in a narrow alley off Maltby Place, two blocks from Singapore River. It is an ancient, two-story clapboard building. Chinese characters decorate the front, and there is a long sign, done in black script, that hangs over the door.

There are no tourists in Chinee's. You will not find it in any of the travel folders. It is a place for the nobodys, for the drifters, a place where you can go and sit quietly among your own kind and watch the young bucks in their silk suits and painted ties and wise smiles, and it is like looking back in time and seeing yourself twenty years ago.

Or you can watch the grizzled old men, their faces buried in

spilled wine on the dirty sawdust floor, and wonder whether you're looking five years into the future.

I crossed the alley and tried the door. It was locked. I banged on the glass and waited. Several minutes passed. A corner of the shade lifted, and a face peered out. A chain rattled, and the door swung open.

He said, "Hello, Vinelli."

He is a huge man. Almost seven feet tall, and weighing close to three hundred pounds. His head is completely hairless, and shines like polished yellow glass. I have known him a long time. He has been a fine friend in times when friends were very few.

I said, "Hello, Chinee."

"We are not open yet, you know."

"I know."

"You look like hell."

"I need a drink."

"Have you got any money?"

"Enough for one."

"All right."

He stepped aside to let me pass. It was very dark inside. And very cool. A pale light burned over the bar. The chairs had been stacked on top of the wooden tables, and a fresh film of sawdust was on the floor. There was no one in sight.

Chinee walked to the bar and went behind. He turned to me.

"You were very drunk last night," he said.

"Was I here?"

"You don't remember?"

"No," I told him.

"You could barely stand."

"What time?"

"Closing. Midnight."

I wet my lips. There were rough and dry. "About that drink."

He shrugged. "An arac?"

"You know what I drink."

"There was a time when it would have been cognac," Chinee said.

"That time is dead," I said. "Died and gone to hell. I don't need anything from you."

Chinee said nothing. He poured the arac, and took the two Singapore dollars I gave him. He leaned on the bar, watching me drink. He had arms like timber logs. I had seen him crush a man's spine with those arms once, in a fight over a Eurasian girl Chinee had been keeping.

I put down the arac. It burned my throat, and I coughed. I wiped my mouth with the back of my hand and found a cigarette in the pocket of the bush jacket. I lit it, and looked at Chinee through the smoke.

"Listen," I said. "Can you let me have a bottle? Until tonight."

He didn't say anything. He came out from behind the bar and walked to the stairs that wound to the upper floors. He turned. "The arac is under the bar. Twelve Singapore dollars, Vinelli. Tonight."

He went up the stairs and disappeared through a door. I heard the loud ring of voices and the click

of tiles from one of the mah jongg games Chinee ran upstairs.

I got the bottle of arac and took my glass to one of the tables. I took down a chair and poured another drink.

After awhile Chinee came down and turned on the lights and went around to take the chairs off the tables. He said nothing to me. He went to the front door and raised the green shade there. It meant he was opening for the day. He unlocked the door and moved around behind the bar.

A little later a British sailor wandered in and sat at the bar. He ordered San Miguel. I went over to him and bummed a cigarette and then came back and sat down again. The bottle of arac was a quarter empty.

A gnawing had begun to grow under my breastbone. It was almost twenty-four hours since I had eaten, and then it had been nothing more than fried rice and fish cakes, washed down with *bok jow*, a kind of oily rice wine. But I had no money to spend for food. And there was the twelve dollars for the bottle of arac.

I decided I would go to see Fordyke.

He was in the import-export trade now. Very proper, with teak-paneled offices on Collyer Quay, and a home in the exclusive Tanglin sector. But he would remember Kowloon, and the load of contraband silk I had taken out of Red China for him. A different Fordyke in those days.

Fifty dollars, American, would not be too much to let sleeping dogs lie. I was thinking about that when the two of them came in.

They were Malayans. Young boys, in their early twenties. One was tall and thin and had a gold tooth in front. The other was short, with thick eyebrows and lips, and built heavy through the chest.

They stood just inside the door. The short one saw me and touched the other's arm. They stood there for a moment, watching me across the room, and the short, heavy-set one began talking in a low voice.

The thin one shook his head. They came across to my table.

Both of them were dressed in white, British-cut shirts and white linen trousers. They looked very cool.

The thin boy said, "You are Vinelli?"

"That's right," I said.

"We wish to speak with you."

"What about?"

"I think it is best if we talk in private."

I shrugged. At the far end of the bar colored beads hung over a doorway that led to private booths in the rear. I took the arac and went through there. They came inside and sat down.

I said, "All right."

The heavy-set boy was staring at me as if he were looking at something with a very bad smell. This

wasn't his idea, whatever they were after.

The other put his hands flat on the table. "It is said that you are a man who is experienced at the helm of a boat," he said. "And a man who knows the waters of the South China Seas, even in the dead of night."

I said, "Maybe."

"It is also said you are a man who can be trusted," the heavy-set one said, like he didn't believe it at all.

I said, "Suppose you get to the point."

The thin boy said, "We have need for such a man."

"To do what?"

"Transport certain supplies."

"What supplies?"

"Foodstuffs. Medicine."

"What else?"

"Nothing else."

I looked at him. He met my eyes, and we sat like that for several seconds. Then I said, "Have it your own way. Where are these supplies bound?"

"Indonesia."

"Where in Indonesia?"

"Sumatra."

"Across the Straits?"

"Yes."

"That's dangerous business."

"Not for a man who has crossed the Straits many times."

"It's been a long time," I said.

"You would not have forgotten."

I drank some of the arac. "You'd better find someone else."

"There is no one else," the heavy-set boy said.

I smiled. "Nobody else will take it on, is that it? They all turned it down. So you come looking for Vinelli. Scraping the barrel, aren't you, boys?"

The heavy-set one's mouth went tight. "You are right," he said. "There is no one else. You are the last man we can turn to. We are desperate."

I smiled again. "All right," I said. "I'll take your boat across the Straits. For one thousand dollars. American."

"Tidak!" the heavy-set one said "It is too much."

I shrugged. "Take it or leave it."

They exchanged glances. The thin boy said, "It is imperative that these supplies reach their destination."

"You have my price."

"Do you have any idea of the importance of the man who awaits our cargo?"

"Tida apa," I said. "It doesn't matter."

The heavy-set boy did not like that. He said, "The man is Dai Chung."

"I know of him," I said.

"Then you understand the importance of what we ask."

"Dai Chung is supposed to be in Viet Nam."

"He is supposed to be in many places," the thin boy said. "But he is now in Sumatra. Few people know of his whereabouts."

"Just where in Sumatra?"

"We cannot tell you that."

"Guerilla fighting, is that it?"

He nodded.

I said, "One thousand dollars."

"Dai Chung and his men are in desperate need of these supplies," the heavy-set boy said angrily. "Perhaps you would see him fail. Perhaps you would see all of Indonesia fall into the hands of the Communists."

"It's not my fight," I said.

The heavy-set one stood up. A blue vein throbbed in his temple.

"What type of man are you?" he said. He was very angry now. "Do you put money before the cause of freedom?"

"Tjukup," the thin boy said.

"Enough, Kion."

I looked at him. They were fine boys, both of them. Oh, you've seen them, boys like these. They brim with ideals. They stand on the soapbox and beat the drum. But what they do not suspect is that age, the great hypocrite, is its one mighty corrupter.

I said, "The Straits are filled with gun boats, and navigation is not easy at night."

"We know this," the thin boy said.

"One thousand dollars is a cheap price for a man to risk his life."

"Do you suppose Dai Chung risks his life for money?" the heavy-set boy asked. He was still angry.

I said, "I'm not Dai Chung."

The heavy-set boy started to say something, but the thin one cut him off. "You must understand, Vinelli, we have but little money. It would be impossible for us to pay that much."

I looked at him. "How much then?"

"Half of what you ask."

"Five hundred?"

"Yes."

"American?"

"Yes."

"Do you have it with you?" I asked him.

He took a folded envelope from his trouser pocket. He laid it on the table. I looked at it. Well, Vinelli, I thought, can you afford to turn down five hundred dollars? It isn't the risk that is bothering you. Or is it? Are you just a little scared now? Once, you would have laughed at the risk. But now the thrill is no more. Five hundred dollars. A lot of money, Vinelli. And the offers have grown very few.

I said, "All right. But let's get one thing straight. I run the operation. I'm in charge."

They looked at each other. The thin boy said, "Agreed." Kion, the heavy-set boy, frowned but said nothing.

I put the envelope in the pocket of my bush jacket. I said, "When?"

"Tomorrow."

"From where?"

"Bayai Cove."

"Time?"

"Midnight."

"What kind of boat have you got?"

"A *prahus.*"

"Power?"

"She will do twenty knots."

"Any weapons aboard?"

"We will have machine-guns."

"Thompson guns?"

"Yes."

"Good," I said. 'I want two men."

"You will need more."

"Just two."

"It is too dangerous," Kion said.

"Look," I said, "if we're spotted in the Straits, it would be suicide to put up a fight. I don't plan on dying because some hot-head decides he can fight a gun boat. I want two good men, and that's all."

"I do not like it," Kion said.

"You don't have to like it," I said. "It's my show. Otherwise, get somebody else."

"We have no choice, Kion," the thin boy said.

Kion clamped his mouth into a tight line, and said nothing.

"Okay," I said. "Where do I meet you?"

"Do you know the Sri Mariamman Temple?" the thin boy said.

"I know it."

"There will be a car."

"What time?"

"Eleven."

I nodded. They stood, and the thin one said solemnly, *"Terima kaseh,* Vinelli." Thank you.

For what, boy? I thought. For maybe getting your purblind head shot off? But I said nothing. I watched them walk to the doorway and into the outer bar.

I poured another drink, and drank it down, and listened to the ceiling fan whir. A huge, blue fly buzzed down and sat in the middle of a drop of spilled arac. I toasted it with my glass.

I LEFT Chinee's a half-hour later.

I walked towards Singapore River. It was very hot. The sky was brilliant cobalt, and the sun hung like some orange ball, suspended on glowing wires. I could smell frangapani, and the salt-rubbed odors of the River.

And I had begun to smell myself.

I needed a bath and some food.

After a time I reached the River. The water was a dark, moss green. Sampans and *prahus* and small Chinese junks huddled together under their bamboo awnings like old men on a grassy lawn.

I found one of the eating stalls, I sat on a foot high wooden stool under a white canvas awning and watched the *tongkangs* shuttle between the storage houses and the freighters lying in the Inner Roads of Singapore Harbor.

I ate rice and Szechuan soup and beancurd.

When I was done I walked back along Telok Ayer Street. At Maxwell Road I turned left until I reached Canal Street. Chinatown. Dark and narrow little alleys and cluttered streets and people

jammed tenfold into tiny rooms no bigger than my crib. Where the Pa' Cheng and other secret societies rule with an iron grip, and the white man is an outsider.

I have lived here for ten years now. They leave me alone. Once, I think it was out of respect. Perhaps that is still the reason, but more out of respect for the image than for the man.

I walked along Canal Street for several blocks. The heavy, sweet odor of joss hung on the hot air.

Near Sago Lane, I crossed the narrow street, dodging an old Chinese *nona* on a bicycle. I pushed through a milling crowd of Chinese peasants in coolie hats standing in front of an open market stall, watching a bearded old man brush swarms of flies from hanging rows of Chinese scarlet sausage.

To the right of the stall I climbed stairs that led to a public bath in the rear. I let hot, clear water turn my skin a boiled pink.

I walked to Punyang Alley. Laundry hung on bamboo poles from windows and balconies, blotting the sun like thick clouds. There were long shadows in the Five Foot Ways, the walkways formed by the supporting pillars of the balconies overhead.

I reached my crib and went upstairs. In the bottom drawer of the dresser I found the money belt. It was old, and the seams had begun to split. I put the five hundred dollars into the pouches and strapped the belt to my waist, under the bush jacket.

I lay down on the mattress and uncapped the bottle of arac I had gotten from Chinee. I had a long drink.

I lay there, drinking from the arac, and watched the sun climb into the sky and then begin to fall again. Late afternoon. There was a knock on the door.

I put the cap on the arac, and set the bottle under the mattress. I said, "Come."

The door opened and a man came inside. A fat little man in soiled white linen, with bad skin and no fingers on his right hand. The Dutchman. He stood there for a moment, letting his eyes become accustomed to the dim light. Then he crossed the room.

"Vinelli," he said. *"Mijnheer."*

He was sweating. He took a stained handkerchief from his pocket and mopped at his forehead. He said, "It is very hot today, *mijnheer*. Very hot. I have come a long way."

"Look," I said. "I don't have any money. And nothing to drink." He was a leech. One of the grubbing expatriates who had no place to go when the Indonesians took their independence from the Dutch. Singapore has many like him.

'No, no, *mijnheer,"* the Dutchman said, mopping at his neck. "It is not that. It is not that at all."

"What do you want?"

"I have something for you."

I looked at him.

He took an envelope from the pocket of his shirt and handed it to me. I opened it. Inside was a sheet of white paper with writing in a fine, light hand.

It said: *I must speak to you on a matter of the utmost importance. The man you go to see tomorrow night is in grave danger. I am at the Hotel Seven Seas, on Bras Basah Road, Room 219. I will await you at eight tonight.*

It was not signed.

I said, "Who gave this to you?"

"A woman."

"What woman?"

"I do not know her, *mijnheer.* She gave me twenty Singapore dollars to deliver the envelope to you."

"Where did you see her?"

"At the Hotel Seven Seas. She asked if I knew you."

"All right," I said. "That's all."

He smiled around his bad teeth. "Good day then, *mijnheer.*" He backed to the door and gave a small bow, and the door clicked shut behind him.

I read the note again. I wondered how she could know so quickly that I had been hired to transport supplies to Dai Chung, but then there are very few secrets in the South China Seas. I wondered who she was, and why she wanted to see me. I wondered what she meant by Dai Chung's life being in great danger. A lot of questions there, Vinelli. But do you really want to know the answers?

Maybe not. But I knew I would go to the Hotel Seven Seas at eight o'clock, even if I was not sure why. I lay down again.

After a time, I went to sleep.

THERE is no sunset in the tropics. The period of time between day and night is very short, and the pink and smoke-gray brush strokes across the horizon fade almost as fast as they appear. But some nights the twilight is longer, and the sky is filled with a strange, yellowish afterglow. The Malays call it *Mambang Kuning,* and they believe that when it appears the evil spirits are abroad.

When I stepped from the trishaw, one of the three-wheeled pedicabs that clutter the streets of Singapore, the *Mambang Kuning* lay across the horizon like a jaundiced pall. I smiled, staring up at the sky.

The boy on the trishaw peddled off. I turned, looking at the Hotel Seven Seas. It was a fine piece of wood-and-glass ornamentation that lay back from Bras Basah Road, partially hidden by jungle-like gardens. Blood-red Javanese Ixora Plants lined the walk.

I went along the path. To my right was a wide patio and swimming pool. Colored lights were strung above it. I saw people sitting on the open porch of the hotel dining room.

I followed the walk over a small bridge that spanned a blue pond,

and around to the side of the hotel. It was three stories. Rose-colored domes lighted the grillwork balconies.

I climbed the outside stairs to the second floor. The door to Room 219 was black teak, with a tiny pearl button recessed into the paneling. I pushed the button and listened to gong chimes sound within.

After a moment the door opened, and a face peered around the jamb.

She was Chinese. Very young and very beautiful. Her skin was very white. Caucasian blood, finely blended.

Her eyes were black and almond-shaped. They held my face. Pink tongue touched pink-rouged lips. I could read the words in her eyes, and I smiled. I had known a time when I would have read other words there.

I said, "I am Vinelli."

"And I am Mai Li," she said. "Come in, please."

I stepped past her. Pale light filtered from the walls. A long couch, with brocade cushions, sat in the center of a Bokhara carpet. The room was very Oriental.

"Please sit," she said.

I sat on the brocade. She sat beside me, turning slightly to face me. I could see her thigh through the slit in the *cheongsam*. It was the color of rich cream.

I said, "I got your note."

"Yes," she said.

"But I don't understand it."

"Then why did you come?"

"Let's just say I was curious."

"And that is the only reason?"

"Just what is it you want?"

"Your help."

I looked at her. She said, "Dai Chung's life is in great danger."

I wondered who this girl was. The name Mai Li was vaguely familiar but I couldn't place where I heard it before.

I said, "I don't know any Dai Chung."

"Please," she said. "I understand your caution. But there is no time."

"What's your connection with Dai Chung?"

"Dai Chung is my uncle."

Of course. Mai Li. That was where I had hear the name. Maybe you read about it in the papers. It was an international incident a little over a year ago. Mai Li, Dai Chung's niece, had been doing some sort of missionary work in Cambodia, and had suddenly, without warning, disappeared.

Rumor had it that she had been kidnaped by the Communists. It was said they had tried to use her to force Dai Chung to surrender. The Communists, of course, denied the whole thing.

In any event, Dai Chung did not surrender. He was a man whose convictions stood above all else. Much as it would pain him, he would not abandon his cause, even to save the life of his niece. But he vowed vengeance, and since that

time had organized and led more than one successful raid on Communist strongholds.

Some said that when Dai Chung did not heed their warning to surrender Mai Li had been executed. Most seemed to think, however, that she was still held captive by the Communists.

I looked at this girl sitting next to me, trying to place her face. But then I remembered that there had been no pictures of Mai Li at the time of her abduction. Our eyes held for a long time. She said, "You do not believe me?"

"I didn't say it," I said.

She held up her right hand. Do you see this ring?"

I looked at it. It was pale green, in the shape of a heart. She said, "It means nothing to you, does it?" I shook my head. "To anyone close to Dai Chung it would mean a great deal. He gave it to me when I was a child. He often spoke of it to his friends."

I kept looking at her. She said, "There is a horseshoe-shaped scar on my thigh. A childhood fall. Perhaps you would care to see it?"

"All right," I said. "You're Dai Chung's niece. But you've been missing for over a year now. And now, suddenly, you turn up here in Singapore."

"I know," she said. She looked away.

"Do you want to tell me about it?"

"There is not a great deal to tell. I was taken from the mission in Cambodia by a group of Communist guerrillas. Surely everyone knew that."

I nodded.

"I was held prisoner at the home of an official in Red China. At first they thought I could tell them of Dai Chung's whereabouts, but I did not know. When they decided that I was telling the truth I was taken to a prison compound. It was said they sent word to Dai Chung that I would be executed if he did not surrender to them. I am glad he did not."

"They released you?"

"I escaped," she said.

"How?"

"I was held at the prison compound for six months, and then they took me to an estate of another official. I was made to do the housework and the cooking." Her lips pulled into a tight, bloodless line.

I waited. After a time she said, "There was a man working at the home of this official. I found out that he was a member of Chi'ang Kai Shek's nationalist underground. For weeks we plotted an escape, waiting, because the time had to be just right. That time came three days ago. I was hidden in a hay cart and taken to the Yellow Sea, where a junk took me across to South Korea."

"Why did you come to Singapore?"

"To warn my uncle," she said.

"As I said in my note, his life is in great danger."

"What kind of danger?"

"He is to be assassinated."

I stared at her. "When?"

"I do not know that," she said. "I know only that it could happen at any time. The nationalists in Red China learned of the plot just before my escape. That is why I was brought to Singapore and given this room here. I must reach Dai Chung and warn him before it is too late."

I said, "The Communists?"

"Yes."

"His camps are known to be fortresses. No one can get in."

"No one has to."

"One of his own men?"

"There are several."

"Do you know who they are?"

"Not all."

"If what you say is true, then what are they waiting for? If they've got people close to Dai Chung, the longer they wait the more chances they have of being found out."

"The guerrillas in Sumatra and the rest of Indonesia are readying a large scale movement against the military junta in Djakarta. Dai Chung is the one man who stands heavily in their way. If he were to die just when this movement began, their chances of success would be heightened tenfold."

I took a cigarette from my pocket and offered her one. She shook her head.

I said, "Why tell me all this? If you have to get to Dai Chung the underground is the best way."

"Dai Chung's whereabouts are known only to his own men. The underground knows who these men are, of course. But they do not know which of them are the Communist conspirators. If they were to go to his men and tell them of the assassination plot, and the wrong man were to find out, Dai Chung would be killed instantly."

"Then why come to me?"

"The underground knows of you," she said. "When we learned you were the one who was hired to take supplies to Dai Chung, we knew it was you who must be the one to help me reach my uncle."

"The underground works fast and knows much, I see. But how do you know I can be trusted?"

"You are known as a man who takes no sides. If anyone can be trusted, it is you."

"If you're right, then what makes you think I'll help you?"

"You would not let a man die if you could help prevent it. Least of all a man like Dai Chung."

"Maybe not," I said. "Just what is it you expect me to do?"

"You must take me to my uncle."

"Listen," I said. "Do you think they told me where he is?"

"Of course not. But tomorrow night, when you take supplies across the Straits, you will find out. I must go along."

"Some of Dai Chung's men will be along, you know," I said. "Suppose they're the traitors? You would die, along with Dai Chung."

"I must risk that," Mai Li said. "And you will be there."

"My bottle and I," I said. "Do you call that protection?"

"Self-pity does not become you, Vinelli," Mai Li said.

I said, "I don't like it. It's not a trip for a woman. Suppose I were the one to warn Dai Chung? If you gave me the ring he would know the warning was true."

"Dai Chung knows I would never take off this ring willingly," Mai Li said. "It is a promise I made to him as a child. He would not believe you."

Her eyes searched my face. Abruptly she stood and walked across to the window that faced out towards the city. She drew back the drapes and stood looking out into the night. The lights of Singapore were like a stairway of candles, reaching up into the black sky.

After a time she said, "Dai Chung has become a legend here. Perhaps you know that. For twenty years, since he fled to Formosa with Chi'ang Kai Shek, he has fought the terrorists. In Laos and Malaya and Viet Nam. He is like a god to many. He fights for peace and liberty. The Communists fear him as much as any man in this world, for they have seen what he can do."

She turned from the window, facing me. "That is why his death must be prevented. At all costs. Do you understand?"

I said nothing, watching her. She crossed to me and sat down. Her bare knee touched my leg. She said, "Help me."

She reached out with both hands and held my face. I watched her own soften, and I saw the tears on her cheeks. "Please," she said. "Please help me." Her eyes were

black caverns, and her voice was that of a little girl.

She moved my head to hers. Her lips touched mine. Her breath was very warm, and she smelled of gardenias.

"Please," she said again.

I thought, Vinelli, the benefactor. Vinelli, the knight in shining armor, the rescuer of fair young maidens. Vinelli, the friend of all those in need. The Vinelli of old, perhaps, but now the picture was incongruous. The knight's armor is tarnished, and his steps are slow, and he seeks comfort and solace at the liquid shrine.

But was there still a spark left, a faint glow that had not died in the extinguishing of the high flame?

I said, "All right. I'll take you to Dai Chung."

She still held my face. Her eyes locked with mine, and I kissed her.

I STOOD WITH Mai Li in the shadows of the Sri Mariamman Hindu Temple ornamental entrance towers. South Bridge Road was dark and silent. It was almost eleven.

The sky had begun to darken with heavy clouds to the north. It was very hot, and the air was still and moist. I didn't like that. If it rained I was calling the whole thing off. It would be suicide to take a small boat like a *prahus* across the Straits in a storm.

Mai Li, standing close next to me, was dressed as I was, in a bush jacket and khaki trousers and high jungle boots. The ebony hair was down now, covering her shoulders. She looked very small and defenseless.

We waited in silence. The gun in my waistband dug a hole into my stomach. It was a Walther P-38, 9mm automatic, a present from a dead German Officer in the streets of Paris on V-J Day.

I took the small silver flask from the jacket pocket and had a short drink. Mai Li watched me with black eyes, but said nothing. I capped the flask and put it into the pocket of my jacket. Just as I did that headlights loomed on the street and a small dark sedan, a French Citroen, slid quietly to the curb. The lights winked out.

I said, "The only way they're going to allow your coming along is if they know who you are. I don't like it but it's the only way. Do you still want to trust me?"

Mai Li said, "Yes," without hesitation.

"All right, then."

"Be very careful."

I stepped from the shadows and crossed to the Citroen. The rear door opened. I looked inside.

"So it's the two of you," I said.

Kion said, "Get in, will you? We have little time."

"There's something first," I said.

They stared at me.

"We'll be having a passenger."

"What do you mean, a passenger?"

"A girl."

"What girl?"

"A girl named Mai Li," I said. I touched the Walther. "Dai Chung's niece."

Kion sucked in his breath. The thin boy said, "She is here? Dai Chung's niece is here?"

"That's right," I said. "She's here and she has urgent information for Dai Chung."

"But how?"

"There's time enough for that later," I said.

"She was being held captive by the Communists," Kion said. "If she had escaped we would know of it."

"Few people know of it," I said.

"This girl," Kion said. "How do you know she is Mai Li?"

"She's by the Temple," I said. "Suppose you ask her."

"Call her, then."

I turned and called her name softly. She came quickly to the car. We slid into the rear seat. It was very dark. I held my hand on the butt of the Walther. I did not know how it would go.

Kion said, "You are Mai Li?"

"Yes," she said.

"How do we know this?"

She showed him the ring.

"It is her ring," the thin boy said. He seemed very excited.

"Anyone could have Mai Li's ring," Kion said.

"You have no doubt heard of the scar on my thigh," Mai Li said. "Dai Chung is said to talk of it. He has never forgiven himself for causing the fall which gave me the scar."

The thin boy nodded. They had heard of it, all right. From the pocket of her jacket Mi Li took a pack of matches and handed them to me. "Please," she said.

I struck one. Quickly she undid the belt at her waist, and in one motion drew the khakis down around her knees. The scar, like a bent horseshoe, shone livid red in the dancing light.

Kion wet his lips.

"We cannot take her with us," he said to the thin boy. "We must speak with Dai Chung first."

"But we cannot do that. And he would never forgive us if we did not bring his niece to him. You know the affection he holds for her. He will be overjoyed to learn of her freedom."

"It is not safe," Kion said.

"Maybe not," I said. "But I told you. She has important information for Dai Chung. She must see him tonight."

"What information?" Kion asked

"That is only for Dai Chung's ears," Mai Li said.

"Damn it," I said. "We're wasting time. The girl is coming along. Either that, or you can forget the whole thing."

"He is right, Kion," the thin boy said. "The boat is waiting."

"All right," Kion said. "But it is against my wishes."

"Come on," I said.

Kion started the car and pulled away from the curb. I watched his thick shoulders as he hunched over the wheel. Traitor? It didn't seem likely. But I was going to watch him very carefully.

We drove from South Bridge Road to Havelock Road and then to Alexandra Road, heading west towards the Straits. We rode in silence. Mai Li sat with her hands folded in her lap, staring straight ahead. She seemed very tense.

We took Impoh Road, leading towards Tuas. After a time Kion swung the Citroen on to a small, rutted road that wound through heavy mangrove swamps. The road was so badly pitted he had to hold the Citroen in low gear. We moved at a crawl.

After we had gone several miles, the thin boy pointed suddenly through the windshield.

Kion pulled the Citroen in amongst the mangroves at the side of the road. He shut off the headlights and engine. The thin boy said, "We will walk from here."

We followed a steep path into a small, marshy ravine, and then up the other side. We stood on a small bluff. Bayai Cove lay nestled below us, rimmed on the left by the mangrove swamps, and by a high wall of limestone on the right.

I saw the *prahus*, a dark, shapeless form anchored a few feet offshore, rocking lightly in the thin swells. A long stretch of sand ran from the waterline back up against the base of the bluff on which we stood. A path, below us and off to our right, wound down from the bluff to the beach.

We stumbled over rocky ground to where the path began. Railway creepers grew in tangled clumps across its damp, sandy surface, and the footing was treacherous. But it was not very steep.

Kion led the way, moving slowly in the darkness. Halfway down, I heard Mai Li give a muffled cry. A man in a dark *baju* shirt and burlap shorts stood blocking the path, and he held a sub-machine gun in his hands. He had come out of nowhere.

I touched the Walther, feeling ice at the base of my neck. But Kion said something rapidly to him in Malay and the man moved aside. I let out a breath. I was jumpy as hell.

The man in the *baju* shirt followed along behind us until we reached the beach. We picked our way through rotting driftwood and kelp to the waterline. The thin boy said, "We will have to wade out."

The water was very cold, and its surface was dotted with lichen. The *prahus* was anchored very shallow. Its hull and superstructure were painted black. Grass mats covered her decks, and the thatched bamboo awning across her girth at amidships had been stained dark.

Two men stood on her deck. One of them slung a Jacob's ladder over the side, and the thin boy helped

Mai Li up. I had palmed the Walther into the pocket of my bush jacket to keep it from getting wet. I climbed up with one hand, but they didn't seem to notice.

When we were all on deck, the thin boy asked one of the guards if everything had been secured. He said yes. The two guards went over to where the Jacob's Ladder hung over the port gunwale. But just before they started down, Kion and the thin boy took the machine guns they carried.

I didn't like that at all. Mai Li gave me a quick look but I shook my head. The Walther was no match for a sub-machine gun. There wasn't anything I could do about it for now. Christ, I thought. Why did you let yourself get into this? It's not for you. Not anymore. If Kion is a traitor all he has to do is raise the muzzle on the Tommy and it's all over. I could feel sweat sticking my shirt to my back.

I stood watching Kion while the two guards waded ashore. He did not look at me, holding the gun loosely in his hands. I motioned Mai Li inside the cabin, and then followed her. I stood at the wheel, touching it with my fingers, watching Kion where he stood with the thin boy aft.

I took the flask out and had a long one. Take it easy, I thought. You're turning it into more than it is.

I looked out at the black waters of the Straits. It had been a long time since I had taken a boat across there. Four years. That had been before the *konfrontasi*, before Suekarno's fanatical vow to crush the Federation of Malaysia had set the waters of the Straits teeming with gunboats.

In the first year of the Confrontation, it would have been impossible to cross in a small and unauthorized boat such as the *prahus*. Suekarno's hold on Indonesia was ended now with the military takeover and the purge, and his self-appointed life-time presidency had died the quick, sure death of all dictatorships.

But the trip was still a fool's journey.

I started the engines. They were muted, but I could feel the power there. Whoever had built the *prahus* had done a nice job. You couldn't tell at all by looking at her what she was.

I let her idle for a time. The lights of the instrument panel were a dull red, so that you had to squint close to check the gauges. But they all seemed to be working properly.

When I was ready I told Kion to go into the stern and raise the anchor. He held the machine gun with the muzzle pointed at the deck. But he turned and went into the stern as I had asked. When he had the anchor raised I put her in gear and got her turned around. I took the *prahus* out past the breakwater and into the Straits of Malacca.

We ran without lights.

The sky was still heavy with smoke. A melon wedge of moon shone briefly, and then retreated behind the clouds. It was very warm, but there was the beginning of a wind.

We were due for a storm, but there was a good chance that it would hold off until morning.

I found some charts in the binnacle and spread them out. The thin boy came inside and marked a spot on one of the charts, where the landing was to be. It was in sheltered water, paralleled by heavy jungle, some ten miles above the island of Bengkalis, between there and a smaller island, Rupat, on the coast of Sumatra.

It was almost fifty miles due west from Singapore. Three hours. Perhaps more. It was cutting the time very close. Three hours. Perhaps more. It was cutting the time very close. Three hours over, and the time it would take to unload, and another hour to get us out of Indonesian waters. If we were still there by daylight our chances were nil. Very close.

There were several small islands, uninhabited, near the landing spot. Jagged shoals and reefs lay beneath the surface, and the channel was narrow and treacherous in several places. The charts the thin boy had given me were not good.

The four of us sat in silence in the cabin, listening to the drone of the *prahus'* engines. Astern, I could see Singapore, a thin gray line receding into the black.

The cabin was small, with hard wooden benches lining both bulkheads. The two Malayan boys sat on one, and Mai Li on the other. Kion never took his eyes off her.

To the right of the wheel a narrow companionway led below decks. I locked the wheel on course, chancing the accuracy of the small compass mounted on the instrument panel, and went to the companionway, peering down into the darkness. I turned to the thin boy. "I'm going to take a look."

"What for?" Kion said.

"I like to know what I'm carrying."

They exchanged glances, and Kion shrugged. It didn't matter to them now, one way or the other. The thin boy said, "If you wish."

There was a flashlight in a metal holder under the wheel housing and I took it and went below decks. I flahed it on, shielding the light with my hands.

There were sacks of flour and rice and cartons of antiseptics and gauze and surgical tape stacked there. I could see four large wooden crates, unmarked, against one of the bulkheads. I knew what would be inside.

Munitions.

Grenades. Rifles. Machine guns. Perhaps even small mortars. All the standard items, I thought. Can you see the fine irony here? To

teach a man to live in peace, we first must kill him.

I had a long drink from the flask. Lord, I thought, I'm tired. I'd seen so much of it. Much more than any man should ever see. And still it goes on.

I went back up into the cabin and took over the wheel again.

I SAW the gunboat just after we crossed into Indonesian waters.

I had been scanning the island of Bengkalis, looming large and black off our starboard bow, with the night glasses the thin boy had. The gun boat emerged to the left of Bengkalis. She was moving south, away from us, following the pencil line that was Sumatra.

I nudged the thin boy and gave the glasses to him. He stiffened. Kion took the glasses from him.

Mai Li said, "What is it?"

"Gunboat," I said.

"Have they seen us?"

"I don't think so."

I swung the *prahus* heavy to starboard and cut the speed in half. I watched the red and green running lights of the gun boat retreating.

"What are you doing?" Kion snapped at me. "More speed!"

"The hell," I said. "We can't outrun her."

Kion gritted his teeth. His hands were white on the machine gun. He stared out at the black water.

Five minutes passed. The thin boy let out a long breath.

"She has gone," he said.

"Keep the glasses on her," I said. "Watch that they don't double back on us."

I put the *prahus* back on course and opened her up. The palms of my hands were sweating. The familiar clawing of the parasite in my temples was back now. How much more of it can you take, Vinelli? I thought. How much more?

The first of the tiny islands was nothing more than barren rock. When we had passed it, I cut the *prahus'* speed, and turned into the channel around it.

We were about a mile off the coast now. I could see the irregular shape of it through the glasses.

We came by on the lee side of another island. I spun the wheel starboard. Two more islands lay ahead, very close together. The channel between them was narrow, and the only passable water without a long detour. The channel here was bounded in coral reefs, and I had seen what would happen if a small boat such as the *prahus* were to cut her belly. She would go down in a matter of seconds.

I bent over the charts, trying to remember. A long time since I had been here, and the memory is dulled by the passage of time and by the numbing edges of alcohol. Sweat stood out in beads on my forehead.

I cut the speed again, and took the *prahus* into the channel. We were only a few scant yards off the

island to the left. I watched black jungle crawl by. I wiped a hand across my eyes, and watched it trembling in the dim red light of the instrument panel. I had the speed down to three knots.

I heard a soft scraping under the *prahus'* keel, and a dark thing came onto the back of my neck. But there was no sound of ripping wood. We came through.

I drank what was left in the flask and felt my hands steady. I turned port again, and then back to the starboard, zig-zagging past a large island grown heavy with mangroves and wild nipa palms.

I looked astern and saw the two of them out there, the thin boy on the port, Kion on the starboard, staring in at the islands. They were watching for gunboats that sometimes lay hidden there in the darkness. It was a wasted gesture. Nothing tonight.

We had gotten very close to shore now. The jungles of Sumatra grew heavy and black, close to the waterline. It smelled dank on the hot night air.

We came into sheltered water. The thin boy had the glasses and saw the beach first. He came inside and touched my shoulder, pointing. It was just a thin patch of white sand, a tiny break in the heavy green growth.

I said, "Do we put in?"

"Yes."

"Are they there?"

"They are there."

I took the *prahus* to within four hundred feet of the beach. It was as far as I could go. I found the anchor in the stern and put it out. We waited.

You could hear the monkeys chatter in rhythmic cadence from high in the trees, and the blended grating of countless jungle crickets was a cacophony of banshee sound. The piercing, overriding yell of a fruit-eating bat split the air. An animal crashed blindly through thick vegetation near the water, rousting a group of sleeping hornbills. Their enraged cries echoed and re-echoed across the water.

I saw two figures, dim shadows on the beach sand. They were carrying a large, dark object over their heads. A third figure walked beside them. They came to the water's edge.

I took the glasses. I saw that the object was a small dugout sampan, some twelve or fourteen feet long. They put it into the water and the third figure got inside and rowed out to the *prahus*. The other two stood waiting on the beach.

The one took the sampan up alongside us. He had a wiry, blue-black beard, and grenades hung from his belt. His hair was long and grew down over his eyes, and there was a white piece of gauze alongside his neck.

He spoke in Malay to the thin boy. Then the thin boy nodded, and they exchanged a rapid conversation. I knew most of it was

about Mai Li. The bearded one gave her a small bow, and she smiled at him, and then he turned and cupped his hands in front of his mouth and made a high, keening sound. The two on the beach disappeared into the brake.

The thin boy said to me, "They will unload the supplies."

"All right," I said. "And us?"

"We go to Dai Chung."

I helped Mai Li down into the rowboat and then followed her.

There was a small group of men on the beach when the one with the beard beached the sampan. Most of them were in jungle green. They were all heavily armed.

They had brought four more sampans, like the first. As soon as we were on the beach, the men put them out, heading for the *prahus*.

The bearded one led us across the sparse sand to the wall of jungle. There was a path there, and you would have missed it if you did not know it was there. It had been chopped out with machetes and *kris* and *parang* knives.

I turned to Mai Li, "Do you know the jungle?"

"Yes."

"You'd better stay close, even though. Hang onto my jacket."

She nodded. The one with the beard moved ahead.

HAVE YOU ever been shut up in a closed, airless room? A room where there is no light, and you can't seem to breathe. You feel trapped, impotent. A strong feeling of morose melancholy clutches at you.

Dense jungle carries much the same impression. The heavy growth of trees and strangling creepers forms a ceiling to blot out the sunlight and the sky. You cannot see more than ten feet in any direction during the day, and at night there is no visibility at all.

I felt the same panic I had known that first time I had gone into the jungle. I wanted to turn and run. Every nerve in my body was wound tight, like a steel coil. I needed a drink. I wished I had saved something out of the flask.

The bearded one moved slowly, his eyes accustomed to the murky black, slashing at unseen creepers and vines with a long-bladed *kris*. The smell of decaying vegetation burned my nostrils. There was the cloying odor of rotting Durian fruit.

Water, held in by the trees from the last rain, dripped in a thin mist. It was damp and very hot. Giant ferns brushed my face as I passed, their long spores like a spider's touch. Tiger mosquitoes and midges bit into my face and neck. Ash gray tree trunks sat silent, moss hanging from them.

We had gone no more than a hundred yards when Mai Li let go of my jacket, clawing at the bare underside of her arm. I grabbed the arm and turned it over. A huge black leech, bloated with fresh blood, clung to the white skin. I

dug matches from my pocket and lit one, and set the flame to it. It dropped off. Mai Li rubbed at the wound but said nothing.

The one with the beard came back to me, gesticulating with his arms. He hissed at me in Malay. A warning not to show light.

We came to a creek bed. A thin stream of stagnant water, about a foot deep, trickled over sharp rocks. We moved downstream. The one with the beard cut left, into more dense jungle, and we began to climb.

We pushed through thick saw-grass and over soft, marshy ground. Near the crest of the rise we came through a copse of green bamboo, and I saw the clearing, almost directly in front of me.

It was very large, and a high wall of stone had been erected around its perimeter. Inside I could see the roof of a building, banana and attap leaves covering a rough wood frame.

We moved along the wall to a gate. Two men with machine guns stood at the top of the wall. The bearded one motioned, and one of them came down and opened the gate. We went inside.

To the left maybe a hundred tents had been pitched, some of them under long bamboo awnings. I could see sleeping figures, and others up and moving around. The building I had seen from the outside was in the center of the camp. Two smaller buildings, storehouses for food and weapons, were off to our right.

There were more guards, all of them with machine guns, lining the wall at twenty-foot intervals. No lights showed anywhere in the camp.

The bearded one led us across to the large building. A wood porch had been built along the front, and there was a single, dark window covered by thick mosquito netting across the outside. He went up onto the porch and motioned us to wait. He knocked lightly on the door and then stepped inside.

I said to Mai Li, "Your uncle must be inside."

"Yes," she said. Her eyes were bright. "Soon, now."

After several minutes the door of the building opened, and the one with the beard gestured to us. We came inside, and he stepped out onto the porch and shut the door behind us.

There was a black shade covering the single window, and a small oil lantern burned on a table to one side. The room was square and sparsely furnished. A long teak table, with rattan chairs, stood at the far end. Behind it was a closed door. Grass mats covered the floor.

We stood in the flickering light of the lantern. The door at the far end opened, and a man came inside. He was short, much shorter than the mental image I had formed, but there was no doubt that he was Dai Chung.

He was up into his sixties, but he carried himself like a man twenty years younger. His face was lined, and a thin white beard grew from his chin. There was dignity in the face, and, although I couldn't see his eyes, I knew they would be sharp and penetrating.

He was an impressive figure in green trousers and tightly-laced army boots, and this kind of dark, thin jacket buttoned loosely across his chest. A silver *kris* hung in a scabbard from his belt.

He stood for a moment, and then came around the table towards us. His mouth was turned in a smile, and he held his arms spread in greeting.

"Mai Li!" he said. "My child."

She stepped forward into the light.

I am not completely sure of what happened then. It was very fast. I saw something happen to Dai Chung's face and he stopped.

"Who are you?" he said in a rising voice. "You are not Mai Li!"

The words churned against my ears. I could not move. If I had been able to react then, I might have been able to prevent some of it. I do not know. By my reflexes were not what they once had been, and I did nothing more than stand watching.

I watched the girl's mouth twist, contort into something alien and ugly, a caricature of the soft pink, and her white teeth glinted in a snarl. I saw her grab the machine gun that Kion held loosely in his hands, and before he could respond she took two steps backward, very fast, bring the gun up in front of her.

"Death to you!" she screamed. "Death to the great Dai Chung!"

The room came alive in seering orange light, and the roar of the machine gun was like a small bomb exploding. Dai Chung had been standing directly in front of her, and his hand was on the *kris* at his belt when the first volley took him in the chest. The impact lifted him like a toy doll and threw him back into the teak table, and over it to the floor on the other side.

The thin boy was on the girl's left, backing away, trying to bring his own gun up. He never had a chance. She swung the burp on him and cut him to his knees with a short burst, and then in one fluid motion, like a trained soldier, turned to where Kion was, almost on her now with his hands reaching for her throat, and shot him full in the face.

I saw her strat to swing around to me, and then, only then, was I able to move. I threw myself to the floor and rolled, the way I had been taught twenty years before, and I heard the machine gun chatter and felt the heat of the slugs as they passed over me and thunked into the wall.

I rolled onto my stomach and came up, and just as I did, the

door flew open and the bearded one and another man appeared in the doorway. She saw them and raked more fire there, and the two of them dove to the porch. Like a dervish, she started to turn again.

I shot her in the throat with the Walther.

Then I stumbled to my feet and ran to the single window and tore aside the shade and the mosquito netting and was sick onto the porch outside.

I SIT now in the small crib in Punyang Alley. The sky is very dark. Outside the window I can hear the wind, and I know that very soon it will rain.

I have a bottle of arac and I sit naked on the mattress and watch the new day being born. I try not to think. But my mind is filled with the pictures.

I can see the floor of the building in Dai Chung's camp, and the bodies of the two Malayan boys sprawled there. And between them I can see the girl, her arms flung out and her face soft and very young in death, and cradled underneath her, like a dark, ugly gray slug, is the machine gun.

Such a waste. Three young lives, snuffed out, ended, lain in sacrifice at the bloody altar of two causes, causes in direct conflict, yes, but so very similar because both will one day stand in Time with the ghosts of all the other causes, long past and long dead.

I can see the still form of Dai Chung and the grim faces of the men grouped around him, as the young Malay doctor probed with quick, urgent fingers at the old man's riddled chest. I can see the doctor stand and turn, and a small smile play at the corners of his mouth, grim but still a smile, and I remembered the flood that rushed through my body because I knew the smile meant Dai Chung would not die, and for this I was thankful. I did not want his blood on my hands, too.

I can hear the sharp questions flung at me by the bearded one, questions for which there were no answers, for what was there for me to say to him? Could I tell him I was sorry? How can you explain the toll time takes of a man, and what it can turn him into?

I drink from the arac. I think, because of what I am, what I have become, three are dead, and the assassination of Dai Chung came very close to being a reality. Without me, or someone like me, there would have been no attempt on his life.

Their plan was carefully put together, of course, right down to the jade ring—taken from the real Mai Li, still held captive somewhere behind the Bamboo Curtain—and the duplicate scar on the girl's thigh.

But it would have been no plan at all if the girl went directly to Dai Chung's men. They knew

this. The chance of her being found out to be an impostor was one they could not afford to take, and careful questioning would have revealed that.

So, who better than an old man, half-blinded by alcohol? Emotion-charged words, and fake tears and kissable lips. All that was needed.

The girl was very good. She knew her part well. God, I think, how she must have been dedicated to her cause. She must have known what she was attempting was a suicide mission. All that training and rehearsing, all for a moment when she would kill, and then in turn, as it has come to be, be killed herself.

Their plan had been very good, yes, but they had made mistakes. I can see them now, even as you might have seen them long before. How could I not have seen them, you ask? Perhaps you are not an old man, and perhaps your hands do not shake, and your mind may be quick and alert and not muddled with drink and a thousand sad memories.

Blindness, too, in more ways than the one, is just one more thing that happens to a man with the passage of time.

Their first mistake was, of course, to set the girl up in the Hotel Seven Seas. It was too plush, too well-populated to be a logical hiding place for a girl who had just escaped from Red China, es-

pecially such an important one as Dai Chung's niece.

There were too many chances of her being recognized there, and of being recaptured. She had claimed to have been helped by the underground, but there were no guards to protect her.

The second mistake was in the story itself. Oh, they had had all the answers to the questions of why I had been chosen to help her reach Dai Chung. A man who could be trusted. Secrecy. The inability of the underground to warn Dai Chung of the imaginary assassination plot because of fear they would inform the wrong party, one of the traitors. Many things wrong here.

The very idea of entrusting Dai Chung's life, not to mention Mai Li's—if she had been the real Mai Li—to the unpredictable follies of

a man such as I, was something the underground would never consider. They did not operate that way.

If the story had been true, they would have hidden Mai Li and taken it upon themselves, through the many outlets they have, to warn Dai Chung of his danger. They are very careful. They are not irresponsible and they are not foolish, and the very idea of sending Mai Li on such a dangerous mission, when there would have been nothing she could do that they could not, was both of these.

As I sit here now, thinking, I can see these things. The haze is gone, but the clarity has come only at the expense of the tragedy at the jungle camp, and I will bear the cross for a very long time to come.

Two of Dai Chung's men went with me to take the *prahus* back to Singapore. In the hold, under a sheet of canvas, lay the bodies of the two Malayan boys. Going home for the last time.

I went down there and stood over them. I am sorry I doubted you, I said to them. Especially you, Kion. I mistook your caution for the fright of a traitor, and for this misjudgment I am truly sorry.

I know the words do little good now, but of all, you are the ones I should never have doubted. You had your beliefs, something very strong upon which you could lean, and I should have known that. Perhaps your cause will succeed, and perhaps not, but at least you had something to believe in. There are many of us who do not.

Just before we reached Bayai Cove, I gave what was left of the five hundred dollars in my money belt to one of Dai Chung's men. I told him to see that they had the proper burial. A small offering, you say. Yes, a very small offering, but it was not done to salve the tortured conscience. It was all that was left for me to do.

I drink again from the bottle of arac. Now, I cannot keep from my thoughts. But soon, there will be the void, and in the void there are no thoughts.

And no time.

And a man ceases to exist.

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THE CONTACT

a new JOHN POND story

He was trapped, in deadly peril, and he must hide his secret. But—could he do it?

by DANIEL FRENCH

THE THREE men sat at the white-topped table in the Paris street cafe. In a service truck, with a see-through panel, two more men

watched from across the street. One was John Pond, American agent; the other, Fernand Lacorne, a French Surete man.

John Pond said, "The man at the left is Russian, an illegal. That is, a spy without diplomatic immunity. The center man is a Korean in the pay of the Red Chinese and the third is French, I'm sorry to say."

"He is no better than the others, M'sieu Pond. One has the microfilm and will pass it to one of the others."

"That's right," Pond said. He saw the Korean pick up a pack of cigarettes on the table and put it into his pocket.

"But these three men will separate when they leave, is that not so?"

"That's how they work," Pond agreed. The Russian made an elaborate pretense of wiping his lips with his napkin and then carefully folding it beside his plate.

"Very well—but we want the microfilm," the Surete agent said. "They are three, we are two."

"Makes it inconvenient," Pond admitted.

The Frenchman picked up his hat which had rested on an empty chair. He dusted it off carefully, bowed and put the hat on as he got to his feet. The other two arose.

John Pond yawned.

"Spies," he said. "They are like women of a certain type. When as we say, the chips are down, we can pretty much determine just what they will do in any given situation."

The Surete man sighed.

"If I could have been sure of that fact," he said ruefully, "I would not be paying alimony to two wives."

"That is not because you are stupid or not discerning," Pond said, a trifle severely. "It is because you happen to be French."

He picked up his bill. "But enough of idle talk. We have work to do. Let us make the arrest."

"But which one?" Fernand Lacorne asked. "We cannot follow all three."

"The Korean," Pond said. "He's got it. We can take him any time."

"You are sure of that, M'sieu Pond? Why?"

John Pond shrugged. "Consider, M'sieu Lacorne," he said. "Each of our friends performed strange little acts which might be called suspicious."

"But exactly!" the Surete man exclaimed. "Therefore, how—"

Pond said, "It was not hard. Observe, my friend. The Korean did the one thing that stood him apart from the others. He was the only man who put his hand in his pocket when he picked up the cigarettes. *Voila!* Let us delve into that pocket."

Inside, Pond and Lacorne found the microfilm which contained NATO war-plan secrets.

And outside, the Surete man, embarrassed, but grateful, bought John Pond a *vin rose* in tribute.

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Staying alive is a good idea!

THE UNDERTAKER'S ASSISTANT

by ED LACY

I DIDN'T want John Curley for a partner, but as we were both new men on the detective squad, I didn't have any choice.

Not that I especially disliked John. I just happened to think he was a jerk. To start with, he dressed like an undertaker's assistant. Despite it being a long and very hot summer he always wore a smart tailored suit, white shirt with a kind of semi-starched collar, tie and a fedora.

And he was such a conservative type in everything! When John does paper work he doesn't skip a line, dots every 'i' and all the rest.

He rarely talks, has absolutely no sense of humor, never even touches beer and I doubt if he ever said a cuss word in his life. Call him Johnny and he'll remind you his name is John; call him Curley and he won't even answer.

On starting a tour he goes through the routine of checking out his gun carefully, like he never saw it before, his handcuffs, note book, pen—he even sharpens his pencils as if he was a bank clerk. I suppose John was a good cop. He made detective for disarming three teenage punks holding up a liquor store.

I'm sure he's memorized all the manuals and knows more laws than the D.A., but I'm the easy-going type and it would have been nice if I had the same kind of part-

ner. Not that police work's a social deal; in fact I've known of partners who hated each other's guts and were a top team, maybe because each was trying to outdo the other.

We started off this afternoon with a stolen car, an out-of-state Caddy abandoned in our squad area. John wasn't content with the license and engine numbers, I had to fry in the bright sun while he went over the damn car like a mechanic for every possible piece of identification, actually typed up a whole page on it when he returned to the office. Naturally, John was a good typist.

Along about ten the lieutenant sent us out on a noisy card game beef. Usually the post cop or a radio car handles a thing like this, but most of our uniformed men were on fly assignment in another part of town where some teen gangs were ready to rumble.

With a complaint like this you tell the folks to quiet down, end the game. You know it isn't any real gambling deal or they wouldn't be loud-talking. What I mean is, you don't expect any big trouble.

The fact is, the house seemed quiet as we walked up three flights to this apartment, knocked on the door. A wild-eyed guy with a sullen face cracked the door, snarled, "Whatcha want?"

When we flashed our shields he asked if we had a warrant, which got me sore. Making a thing out of nothing. I told him somebody had phoned in about the noise and he said they'd shut up, started to close the door.

Doors slammed in my face annoy me. I put my shoulder to the door and we rushed inside. Before I knew what the score was, another goon has this thin switchblade at my throat and the wild-eyed guy had a knife creasing John's throat. Around a card table, littered with drinks and food, seven men and women were staring at us with frightened eyes. I guess I looked as scared as they did.

Things fell into focus fast: of course we'd walked into a stick-up! The shiv punks had been picking up the few bills and pile of change on the table when we'd knocked.

I stood there, doing nothing but sweating. With cold steel creasing your throat there isn't a thing you can do, if you want to keep your head on top of your neck. I felt the guy take my gun with his free hand, pocket it. The wild-eyed punk pocketed John's rod. Every man to his weapon; these were knife artists.

I began to sweat more: losing your gun is a serious beef and I could see myself back in uniform, *if* I lived. But up close there isn't any defense against a knife. I didn't try swinging nor bringing up my knee. I've never been one for posthumous medals.

Wild-eyed snapped, "Back against the wall, fuzz, and keep

your mitts in sight. Then we'll add your wallets to the kitty. Move it!"

We backed to a wall and I was glad to get even a little distance been my skin and those knives. I glanced at John. He was sweating worse than me, but also staring solemnly at the two punks. He moved a few steps away from me, but still hugging the wall.

As the punks half-turned toward the money on the card table, John said calmly, "You're both under arrest! Drop your knives!"

The two shiv men merely grinned at this stupid talk. Then, to my shocked amazement, John lowered his heavy arms a little, sort of like a pug protecting his face, and stepped toward the punks! John's a big man and his belly made a large target. Both guys sunk their knives into John's unprotected gut.

With reflex action I dropped the nearest bastard with a rabbit punch on his thick neck, kicking the other between the legs with the same movement. I was a good street brawler before I joined the force. They fell to the floor, my guy out cold; wild-eyed twisting and groaning, both hands pressed to his groin.

John was a little bent over and fighting for air, like a stuck pig with the knives still in him, most of the blades showing.

I quickly handcuffed the guy I'd clipped: wild-eyed wasn't going to do a thing but moan for at least an hour.

Taking my gun from the stiff's pocket, I told the card players to keep their seats and shut up.

As I started to help John toward a chair, he gasped, "I'm okay—Harry. Merely had the wind knocked out of—me."

Then, I'll be damned if John didn't proceed to pull out one of the knives!

"John, don't!" I yelled. "You'll bleed to death. Just sit down and I'll call an ambulance. Stay still, I tell you!"

"I'm all right," he grunted, yanking out the other knife from his jacket front. The blade had broken off, near the point. Then John bent down to get his own gun and cuff the slob I'd drop-kicked. Glancing at me, he nodded toward a phone on the other wall, said casually, "While I call in for a squad car, Harry, you start getting the names and addresses of the players, as witnesses. Then we'll—"

"John, are you nuts? You must be bleeding to death!"

"I don't think so." He put his free hand inside his shirt and held it up when he pulled it out—no blood.

While I and the card players stared, John phoned and the lieutenant said he was sending a wagon around, wanted everybody taken in for questioning.

We stood around, waiting and I couldn't take my eyes off John. He took out his notebook, started the routine of writing the players'

names and addresses. One of the women at the table asked him, "You sure you're not hurt, mister? I mean I've some bandages in the bathroom and—My God, I saw both those—those knives go right into you!"

"Thank you, but I'm not cut," John told her.

"What have you got, John, a real cast iron gut?" I asked.

"Well, yes, sort of," John said, grinning slightly, the first smile I'd ever seen him try. "I figured if it could stop bullets, it should do the same for a knife. You see, Harry, I *always* wear a bullet-proof vest. Sort of standard equipment, I say."

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THE PETARD HOIST

Somewhere in that house of death lay the answer to all my desires. But—where?

by NORMAN DANIELS

GRANDMOTHER Marley had always been outspoken. She could say things that would often hurt Ronald Marley, her grandson,

to the quick. Since she'd been compelled to deliver herself into the hands of this very expensive nursing home, her tongue had grown even sharper.

From her pillow, she looked up at Ronald, seated beside her.

"I am leaving you all my estate, Ronald," she said. "Not because I love you to distraction, nor for any favors you may have bestowed upon me. My reasons are quite simple. You are my only living kin and you are so stupid, under your glossy polish, that you'd be unable to get along without my money."

"Grandmother," he said, "you're not to talk about such things."

Grandmother knew what she was saying, however, or she was obstinate enough to bring her words to immediate effect, because some ten minutes later, she turned her face away from her grandson, and quietly passed on. So quietly, in fact, that Ronald wasn't aware of it for some time.

When he was sure, he didn't panic. He sat there and schemed his little schemes. The kind he'd always indulged in. He went to the closet and found Grandmother's huge handbag on the shelf. There were times when he felt she must be carrying all her worldly wealth in it.

He found what he wanted. A heavy bunch of keys. His fingers had itched to gain possession of these keys for many years, because they would unlock the treasure house which had been Grandma's.

Ronald was no hypocrite, and certainly intelligent enough to realize Grandmother spoke the truth. He would hardly be able to get along without help.

Ronald, at forty, was lazy and relished the fact. He was short and fat and not at all good looking, which didn't bother him much. He was greedy and selfish and saw nothing unadmirable in those traits. He wouldn't, under any circumstances, have resorted to violence, nor even crime, to get what he wanted because he was also essentially a coward.

What he had in mind at the moment was only a small matter of cheating. If Grandmother had been so obliging as to die this way, he certainly should take advantage of it.

He closed Grandmother's eyes reverently, turned out all but the small night light. Then he went to the door and waited until he heard a nurse approaching. He could tell it was a nurse because they all wore sponge rubber soles and heels which squeaked and squished on the cement floor.

He stepped into the corridor. "Have a good rest, Grandmother." He looked back into the room benignly. "I'll see to it you're not disturbed. I'll come again tomorrow. Good night."

He closed the door softly and smiled at the nurse, who nodded that she understood Grandmother

didn't wish to be awakened. Ronald went his way, one hand in his pocket, warming the bunch of keys. He drove straight to Grandmother's big, ancient house on the hill.

It wasn't stealing, he told himself firmly. It wasn't actually a crime, like appropriating something that didn't belong to you. Grandmother had said all she owned would be his and now that she was dead, everything did belong to him.

However, Grandmother had always had a distrust of financial institutions. Not that she worried about their stability; only that her money was being used for purposes she would hardly have approved of and, even more important, at a rate of interest which made the bank rich from her money.

It was a matter of considerable amusement to some, and great apprehension on Ronald's part, that Grandmother was hiding great sums of cash around that big ark of a house.

Ronald had often worried about it, sometimes to near distraction, but Grandmother had caused the windows to be decoratively barred and the doors replaced with ones that couldn't be splintered, burned, or cut through.

Therefore the money was safe. Safe enough, until the greed of the various tax collectors, executors, lawyers and such, dug their big fat hands into it. Then, whatever was left would be his and it wouldn't be much, according to his standards.

If he could find the cash before Grandmother was declared dead, and put it safely and secretly away, they'd say Grandmother's reputation as a wealthy miser, was the same as most such reputations—based upon fantasy. All her money would be his, intact, without being cut into segments and swallowed

by people who had no moral right to have it.

Ronald let himself into the house. He turned on the lights and made no secret of his presence. After all, this was his now. He hadn't come here often because the place distressed him in its old-fashioned splendor, so out of keeping with the times.

The reception hall was, for instance, lined with high, leather-backed chairs tooled with the faces of men in helmets, and the seats covered with scarlet upholstery.

The living room was literally crammed with furniture much too big for it, even though the room was massive. Here were breakfronts, old relics of pieces. Here were ornate and ancient divans, lounges, chairs, desks and chests.

(*Please turn to page 136*)

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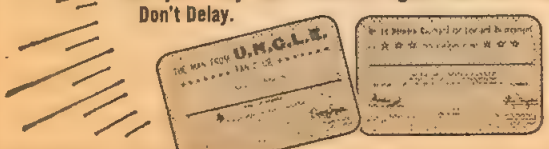

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All the rooms in the house were furnished this way and every piece of furniture made a fine place to hide money.

Ronald took off his coat and tie, rolled up his sleeves and prepared to go to work. First he looked vainly about for a hidden safe, though he was quite certain there was none. After that, he sat down at Grandmother's highly polished, seasoned, old desk and used the keys to unlock the drawers.

He found yellowed letters, wads of old bills and receipts, some faded newspaper clippings, family documents and a number of bankbooks which were far more entertaining than the old articles.

The bankbooks showed no balance. Not a penny, except for a new one in the top drawer and separate from the rest. That one indicated a nice sum on deposit and apparently was the source of Grandmother's ready cash.

But the old ones had the greatest meaning because they showed withdrawals in large sums. Never less than a thousand, and sometimes as high as sixteen thousand. To Ronald, that had a real meaning. Grandmother took out only as much as she had a hiding place prepared for. Certainly she hadn't spent all that money.

It was literally impossible without something to show for it, so the stories about her miserly ways must be true.

Ronald went to work. Before long, he took a quick trip to the basement, where he found an ancient tool box. The tools were sturdy and serviceable, and he used them. When a chest, for instance, revealed its contents as only old, moth-eaten drapes, he took the chest apart.

He worked methodically, going from piece to piece and gradually growing panic-stricken with anxiety when he found nothing.

There was one breakfront, an enormous thing of little drawers and unexpected cubby holes and filled with dishes. He broke many of these as he threw them aside in his haste.

In the morning, Grandmother would be found dead and the probate court would lose no time in sealing the house. Speed was essential.

The breakfront was empty at last, and he'd found nothing, but when he dragged it savagely away from the wall, he heard something rattle inside and his hopes soared. He used a hatchet on it and finally located the source of the rattle. Some cabinet maker had merely left a small bit of loose wood inside a hollow section.

Then there was that pink and white brocaded divan that looked as pretty as an Easter egg. Ronald removed the cushions and dug his hand down behind the upholstery and he brought up a ten dollar bill. One of those old, oversize ones that went out of circulation years ago.

So he'd found her cache. He felt like shouting his elation.

It required the use of the hatchet, a hammer, and a sharp knife to reduce the divan to splinters, rags and stuffing, but there wasn't any more money. The bill must have slipped down years ago and stayed there.

Ronald was angry by now. A glance at the grandfather clock indicated it would be daylight before long. He had to work faster. The clock itself annoyed him, and he destroyed it, thinking he could vent his anger at it while he made certain it wasn't being used as Grandmother's secret bank.

He ran upstairs and tore apart the beds, slit the mattresses, even cut the rugs as he'd done in the living room and dining room. When daylight came, he was soaked with perspiration, stained with the dust of a century, and in a vile temper. There wasn't a stick left intact.

Grandmother was right—he *was* stupid. He couldn't find the hiding place of an old lady, just mean enough to make him work for her money.

He'd worked. He sank, exhausted, on to one of the chairs in the reception hall. Or what was left of it. He'd slit the cushion, reduced the leather backs to ribbons, and smashed the legs and rungs.

When the doorbell rang, he was almost happy that he'd no longer be permitted to search. He'd have to be satisfied with what the tax people and the lawyers would leave. It would be a substantial amount, according to the withdrawals in the bankbooks. He wasn't a defeated man, only a frustrated one who felt he was already cheated.

Attorney Paul Harris came in, when Ronald opened the door. He looked about him with awe. "I see there's no need to tell you Grandmother Marley is dead."

"Yes," Ronald said, "I was there."

"And you came here to search for her money."

"I had a right. She told me I was the only heir."

"So you were," Harris agreed. "I drew the will myself."

Ronald seized him by the lapels of his immaculate coat. "Where did she hide the money? Tell me where it is, damn you. I've searched and searched . . ."

"There was no cash," Harris said, and Ronald stared at him. "Oh," Harris went on, "she left a considerable estate, but not in cash. Your grandmother didn't like banks or bankers. She was afraid to keep a great deal of cash around, as she was reputed to have done. She realized, too, that jewels might be easily stolen.

"So she invested in something which burglars not only wouldn't recognize, but be quite unable to cart off easily. Something that would grow in value and which she could admire while she lived, and feel she was getting something out of her investment."

"Harris," Ronald said, "there is nothing here. Nothing!"

Harris peered into the living room and sighed deeply. "True, Ronald—only too true. Her money was invested in antique furniture. These tooled chairs you hacked to bits, for instance, were from Spain. Historic relics. Each carving was that of a Spanish nobleman. There was a pink and white divan which once belonged to Marie Antoinette, chests from ancient Portugal, paintings of old masters—not famous, but quite valuable. Ronald, you didn't—"

Paul Harris rushed into the living room and looked with anguish at the slashed paintings and the broken frames. He wanted to sit down, but there wasn't a stick of furniture left, capable of being sat upon.

"You're an imbecile, Ronald. What she meant you to have, you destroyed. A fortune. A great fortune! I don't know that a crime has been committed, but you've been punished for your greed. You're one man 'hoist with his own petard!"

"Shakespeare," Ronald Marley said miserably. "That's from Shakespeare, and I never knew what it meant before."

In the Next Issue

Another DEPARTMENT OF LOST STORIES Masterpiece

UP UNDER THE ROOF

by MANLY WADE WELLMAN

Wherever the occult is mentioned, whenever top grade fantasy is discussed and evaluated, Manly Wade Wellman's name invariably crops into the conversation. And with good reason: Mr. Wellman for decades has been the "author's author", the perfectionist whose tales were written to be remembered and are. The next "Lost Stories" treat, Mr. Wellman's early "Up Under the Roof," was written so early in his career that not enough people, we feel, have had a chance to thrill to its macabre brilliance. We therefore proudly present it in next month's department. Don't miss it, hear?

TRAITOR'S ROMANCE

She was short and dumpy and unlovely. But she had something he wanted and he was going to get it—even if it killed him . . .

by DOROTHY FRIEND

SARAH MIPPS adjusted the ridiculous fur-lined hat over her mouse-gray hair and knew it didn't do a thing for her. In fact, very little did. And the bulky coat only

added inches to her short, squat frame.

But this was Moscow; it was cold and she wasn't the type who could boldly defy the thermometer in light-weight, if stylish, clothes. The coat was a horrible shade of dull red, but there wasn't much of a selection in any of the stores here, where everything was supposed to be sold, but more often wasn't, or remained in constant short supply.

She opened her ample handbag and stared grimly at the many sheets of photographic paper, tightly folded so as not to make too much bulk. She snapped the purse shut, turned off the light on her desk and went out into the spacious corridor.

As she walked briskly toward the main exit, a guard came to attention until he saw who it was. Then he relaxed and gave her a warm grin.

"Working late tonight, Miss Mipps."

"There are always things to do," she said. "An American embassy, anywhere, is always a very busy place."

"Yes, ma'am," he agreed. "You diplomats sure earn your pay."

There was no sarcasm in his voice. To Miss Mipps, it wouldn't have made any difference if there was. She knew very well her position as a clerk didn't classify her as a diplomat. He opened the door for her and she went out into the icy air and the sidewalks banked with everlasting snow. At least, the storm was over and the sky was clear.

She always walked with a brisk pace, looking neither to the right nor left. There was never anything to see anyway—not in the way of men who might be interested in a female.

Sometimes Sarah Mipps had a feeling she wasn't female at all, but some sort of a cross between a fireplug as to shape and a gargoyle in appearance. Actually, she was just a very plain looking woman with a dumpy figure and she would never be anything else.

She wore low-heeled shoes because she looked ludicrous in high heels. Her hose was of heavy nylon, not in the least sheer, but it was warm and at twenty-nine years of age, creature comforts were an important item to a woman like Sarah Mipps.

She turned a corner and suddenly came to a stop. There was some trouble with her shoelace and it kept her occupied for a few moments—until she was sure no one had been following her.

She walked for half an hour, doubling back at times, entering a building by one door, leaving by another and finally selecting a long, straight, empty side street along which she moved rapidly. It was impossible that anyone was on her trail now.

Sure of it, she crossed several avenues, turned another corner

and as she approached the door of an ancient but still lovely private dwelling, the door opened as if she'd not only been expected, but actually watched for.

The man who took her hand was tall, his brown hair graying at the temples. His brown suit was typically Russian cut, but he managed to wear it with a flair. He wore a narrow, though somewhat gaudy tie and jade cuff links in the fine quality shirt he imported from Italy.

"My dear Sarah," he said in only faintly accented English. "I worried about you."

She removed her hat and struggled out of her coat with his help. She touched the sides of her hair, primping only because it was expected of a woman. Primping never did a thing for her.

"I spent considerable time making certain no one followed me from the American Embassy, Anatoli. I thought it important."

"Of course, of course. You brought the documents, then?"

"I brought copies," she said defensively. "It would have been much too risky to even borrow the originals."

"I see. They would be sort of thermofax copies, then?"

"Yes. I made them myself this evening. Everyone was at a formal dinner at the Kremlin and the opportunity was rare."

"May I see them, my dear?" He held out his hand.

She clutched her handbag firmly. "I'm not even certain I'll give them to you, Anatoli."

She walked ahead of him into the large, opulent drawing room done in dark tones of red with the customary plush-covered furniture so dear to Russians. Even the draperies were of the same dull red color and very heavy looking. The rug was Oriental, soft underfoot, luxurious. A gaudy samovar occupied one of the central, marble-topped tables. It was a valuable antique, representative of the fine quality of this apartment.

The room was quite familiar to her. She'd been here four times previously, all within the past week, so it no longer impressed her as it had when she'd first entered it.

"Sarah, my dear one, if it is against your principles to give me the documents, I shall not press you for them. Getting money is not as important as that."

She looked at him with eyes suddenly gone watery. "But I believe you said without money and the prestige your writing will give you, there'd be no chance for us . . ." Her voice trailed off as if she'd said too much.

He smiled warmly at her from his height advantage of seven inches. He was undeniably handsome, she thought again. And so polished and sincere.

"Sarah, my loved one, with or without your help, we shall finally

accomplish what we wish, so that we may be safe and happy. But, of course, it will take a little longer."

"I don't want any delays," she said quite firmly.

He drew her close and pressed her tenderly against him so that her head rested on his chest and she could hear the steady beat of his heart.

"I don't enjoy being a traitor," she said. She moved her head back to look up at him without trying to break his gentle embrace. "I could hate myself for it, but I wanted just one chance at life. I'm not attractive. I've got a horrible figure and I'm a bad dresser no matter how hard I try. No beautician can do a thing with my hair and I always felt I was a hopeless mess—until you came along.

"And to top it all, I'm just a clerk at the embassy with no opportunity to better myself."

He bent his head and kissed her lightly. "Nonsense, my dear Sarah. Those things are in your mind and you dwell on them too much."

"Anatoli, don't deceive me with lies about my appearance. Any mirror tells me the truth."

"To me, you're lovely," he said emphatically. "A dignified, intelligent, fine woman. No man could ask for more."

"I hope that's the truth. Oh, I don't know." She pulled away from him and walked toward the giant samovar. Her hands touched its polished surface; her eyes and her thoughts seemed to be far away.

He went to her. "I have made a grave mistake, my dear," he said. "We were happy until I suggested you provide me with the documents I needed."

"I can't get used to turning against my own country," she said plaintively. "It just isn't right."

"Very well. As you know, I managed to obtain all of the documents about the plans of NATO in the event of war. However, without those you promised to get me, the ones I have are of little value. As I showed you from letters and telegrams, I can get a considerable sum of money for an article I intend to write, using these documents to aid me.

"I have always wanted to do something like this, something sensational that would place me in the confidence of my own government and get me an assignment abroad. Once I leave this miserable country, I'll defect. We could meet somewhere—I would need your help to adjust then."

"You'd have little trouble," she said. "I'm sure of that. And, after all, you'll be a traitor to Russia too. As I am to my own country. I think we could live with the idea if we found happiness."

"I could," he said sincerely.

"Oh, Anatoli," she exclaimed. "Here! Take these documents now. Don't give them back to me. Put them away so I cannot get

them if I should change my mind. Please! I don't want to see them again, ever."

He accepted the documents and went to a life-sized portrait of some ancient Russian noble. He caused it to slide away from its position as a screen for a large built-in vault. He spun the combination, opened the heavy door. Then he removed the thermofax copies from the heavy envelope and scanned them. He nodded in approval and indicated two thick manila envelopes inside the vault.

"Now I have them all, Sarah. In a week's time, I shall write my article and astound the whole world with it. And all because you helped me."

She looked at him and fiddled nervously with the still-gaping handbag she carried. "Lock the door, Anatoli. I want to take them back, to destroy them. I feel I'm making a mistake. Not even the love of a man as kind as you is worth—this."

He closed the vault and locked it. Then he replaced the portrait and came toward her with a smile.

"Don't worry, my loved one. This cannot be traced to you. And in that safe is our future. It will be beautiful. You'll see.

She gazed up at him adoringly. "Kiss me once, Anatoli, and then let me go, please. I'm a miserable coward."

"My dear," he said gravely, "what you have done is nothing. Most of these plans are known to the Kremlin. All I'll do is make them public—for money that will enable you and me to live in love and peace. Good-by, my darling, until we meet again where it's safe for us. I promise you it will not be long."

He kissed her and she clung to him with her short arms until she could stand no more. She drew away from him and ran out of the house.

She walked hurriedly along the street, without looking back.

She maintained a direct route straight back to the American Embassy and let herself in the now-unguarded door with a key. She walked down the corridor to the small office where she did her work. She stepped inside and closed the door.

Instantly the lights blinded her and she brought a hand to her eyes quickly. The man who sat behind her desk was bulky, strong, keen-eyed. A brainy man, finely educated, or the CIA wouldn't have promoted him to his present position.

"Well, Sarah, how'd it go?" he asked in a pleasant voice.

She blinked against the light, but finally grew accustomed to it. She took off her hat and coat, threw them on a chair and sat down, facing him.

"He put the copies in the safe. The other envelopes stolen from here, were also in the safe. I pre-

tended I might want the ones I gave him, back, that I was afraid I'd change my mind, so he put them away immediately."

The man at the desk looked at his watch. "You cut it quite close, Sarah. The chemicals must have gone into action right after the safe door closed on them."

"Oh, he was so smug," she said. "So polished and sure of himself."

"I wonder what he'd have thought if he'd known you were one of the best foreign agents in our service. You're a wonder, Sarah. You simply don't look the part and you're so very, very good at it."

"Shall I call him now, do you think?"

He nodded. "The safe is completely filled with the gas by this time and it will explode into flames the moment the door opens."

"I hope he doesn't get hurt," she said.

"Why do you say that? Anatoli is one of their most dangerous agents."

"I know. I saw our dossier on him, but, well . . ."

She picked up the telephone and called Anatoli's number. He answered at once.

"Anatoli, I've changed my mind. I want the documents back. I'm coming over at once."

"If that is what you wish," he said, his voice surprised and cold.

"I'll be there in fifteen minutes," she told him.

"I'll be waiting for you, Sarah. I'll be very pleased to see you."

She hung up. The CIA man lit a pipe and leaned back. Sarah closed her eyes tightly and sighed.

Moments later, they heard the sounds of the fire trucks. Many of them.

The CIA man removed the pipe from his mouth. "He managed to steal almost all our NATO documents through the use of the Russian people who service the building. They were very clever about it, but not as clever as we, eh, Sarah?" He looked out the window. *We had to destroy the documents he had,* he was thinking, *and the only way was to get him to put an innocent-looking fire bomb where the documents were.*

"I do hope he wasn't hurt," she said again.

"Sarah, I tell you he's a dangerous man."

"I know. I know very well, but he was kind to me. He kissed me as if he meant it and we made some wonderful plans. Sometimes I think he half believed in them. I'll never know, will I?"

"Not likely, old girl. You're being sent to Ankara tomorrow. Important job there and you're the girl to handle it. You're very capable, you know. You fool everyone with —well, a plainness that makes you seem so vulnerable."

"Everyone but me," Sarah Mipps said, a little forlornly, "Everyone but me."

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